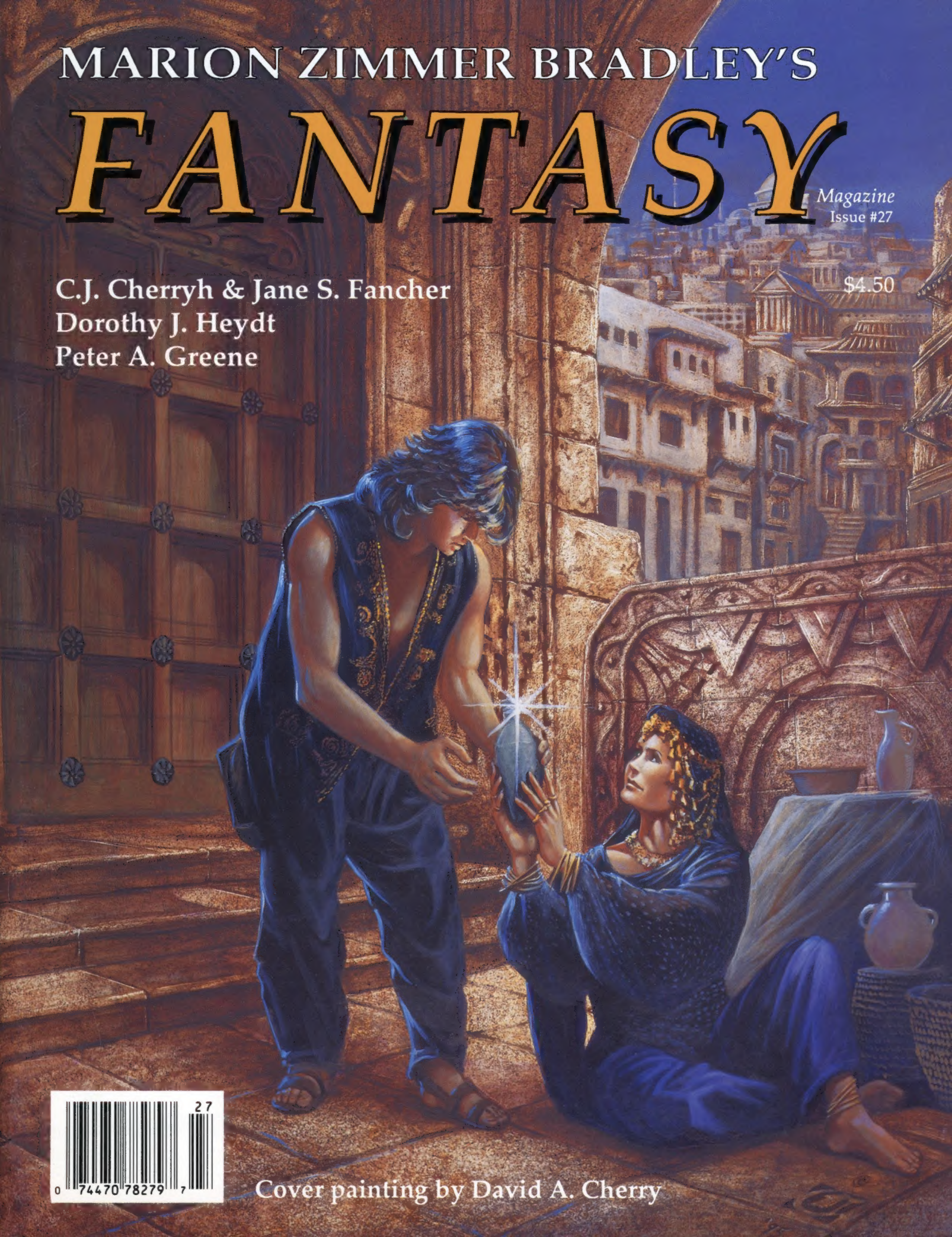
MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY
Magazine
Issue #27
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C.J. Cherryh & Jane S. Fancher
Dorothy J. Heydt
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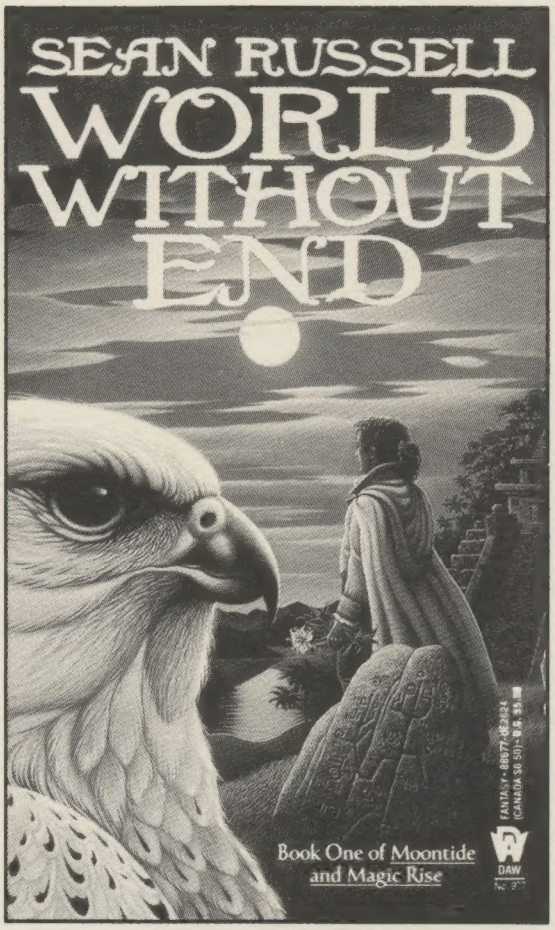
THE LOST SECRETS OF THE MAGES...



The age of Mages is over, and all the secrets of their magical arts are thought to be lost to the world. There are even those who suspect that the last of the great Mages spent their final years scrupulously eradicating all traces of their craft from the pages of history—insuring that their art will never be practiced again. It is the dawn of a new era: an age of reason, science and exploration, and Tristam Flattery is one of its most promising young naturalists.

But when Tristam is summoned to the royal court of Farrland to try to revitalize a failing species of plant which seems to have mysterious, almost magical, medicinal properties—a plant without which, he is told, the aging king will surely die—he soon realizes that he has been drawn into the heart of a political struggle which spans generations, a conflict which threatens the very foundations of his civilization. And before long, Tristam is caught in the grip of a destiny which will lead him to the ends of the known world—a voyage of discovery that has more to do with magic than with science...

Book One of *Moontide and Magic Rise*

WORLD WITHOUT END

Sean Russell

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EDITOR
Marion Zimmer Bradley

PUBLISHER
Rachel E. Holmen

DESIGN
Art Weller

CLERICAL ASSISTANCE
Heather Rose Jones
Stephanie Shaver

PROOFREADING
Gil Lamont
Debbie Notkin

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MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY
Magazine

EDITORIAL

After nearly six years of the magazine, I am still becroggled by people submitting manuscripts to me under pen names. By now people who know me and the magazine are aware of my intractable distaste for pen names except under very specific conditions. There are three or four good reasons for using a pen name. There is the reason Ms Alice Mary Norton had for becoming "Andre". Feminists to the contrary it had nothing to do with the myth of using male names. It was the very simple fact that the well-known English children's fantasy author Mary Alice Norton was the author of the very successful "Borrower" stories.

I once asked Catherine Kuttner (married to Henry Kuttner, another writer) how she had become C.L. Moore. She said it was just a kind of superstition. She had used different versions of her name and the first one she sold under was the name C.L. Moore — so C.L. Moore she became and remained. When she began selling to *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, some of her stories were published under her husband's name because he had sold to that magazine before and was more highly paid. At that level, the difference between a half or a whole cent a word was substantial; I have sold enough novels for $500 myself to know what she was talking about.

I didn't even know that part of the South thinks of "Marion" as a male name, any more than I knew that my father's name "Leslie" was regarded as female to half the civilized South. I once suggested giving my daughter the name Leslie, but my father would probably never have spoken to me again. He was sensitive on that subject.

Which reminds me of the time I was in a women's bookstore and overheard a woman say, "I happen to know Marion Bradley is a man," whereupon the owner replied, "I must be sure to tell her next time she's in here; I know her children would be amused to hear it."

I hid behind a bookshelf until the customer had taken herself off. When I came out, the bookstore owner and I had a good laugh.

Leigh Brackett started writing science fiction before she became Mrs. Ed[mund] Hamilton. The last time I heard Leigh speak, she was telling us of a cross-country trip where the Hamiltons and Kuttners had shared a car. She spoke as if it had been a highlight of her life. It's hard to realize that they aren't with us any more. If tales of the afterlife are true, some day all of us will be together at that big convention in the next world.

Marion Zimmer Bradley

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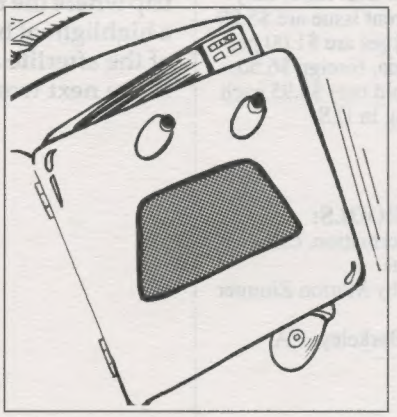

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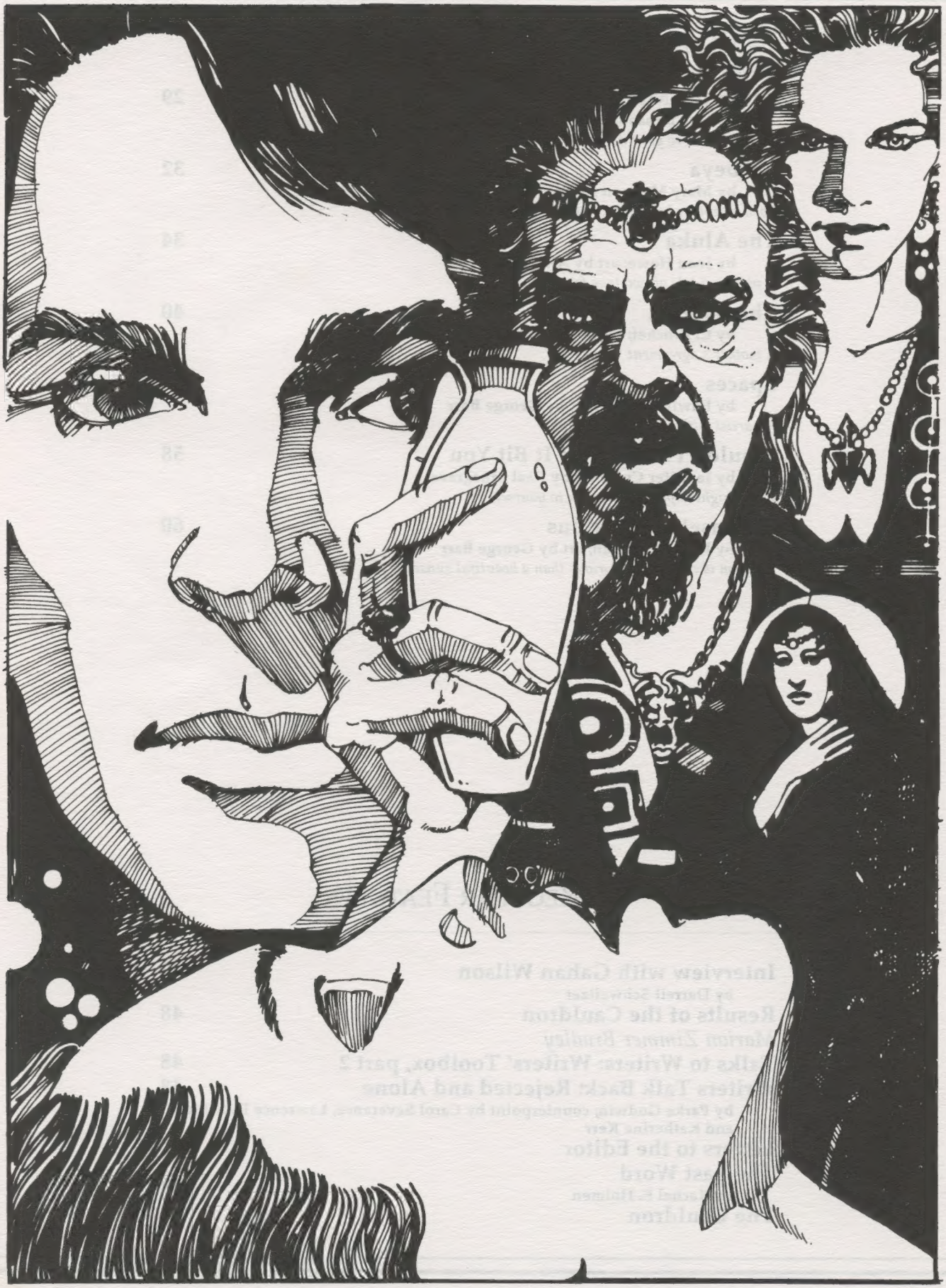


Artwork by James Balkovek

Pot of Dreams

BY C.J. CHERRYH & JANE S. FANCHER

Would you buy a dream?

Long ago in a land of fable, a city existed in which dreams were trafficked. Its name was Ormisar.

There were buyers: the richer a man is, of course, the more dreams he can buy. Of course. And the richer a man is, the more he has all he needs, the more he has seen all a rich man might see, the more he has done all a man might to do, the fewer his own dreams and aspirations are bound to be.

And there were sellers: the less rich have dreams to sell — as they do, through the years, for the privilege of living in the city — and for the privilege of employment by the rich. These are the dreams of extravagance, of romance...and of hope. Dreamed by those who dream of riches, who desire that which the buyers have, and whose dreams soar into improbable deeds and results, lacking the harsh limits of Reality.

The most destitute have no dreams at all, because they have neither hope nor expectation, and their dreams would be such — a full meal, a place to sleep without rats and cockroaches and filth — that the rich would never care to buy them, so what was the use of dreaming?

Then there were the brokers of dreams: petty magicians, workers of magic, who capture the dreams and sell them to dream-merchants in the great High Street of the temples. These are technicians. Middlemen supplying the needs and desires of others, but with little inventiveness and no penchant for sampling — or contaminating — the wares that pass through their talents.

For that reason they have respectability and the natural air of one to be trusted — at least by the rich who desire the dreams. Who need the dreams to enhance the exquisite, the baubles, the decoration of their lives — that being all that remains to them to do with their wealth. The rich, who desire the renewed sense, duly paid for, that what they have is of worth and desirable — to someone, and therefore, to themselves.

Would you sell your dreams? Before you answer, consider:

You might hold your dream for years and years, nourish it, in the hope that one day it might flourish into your Reality. But let it grow too large and elaborate, let it grow well beyond the reach of the means you have — and then you might say: Well, but practically speaking...and practicality would dictate, then, if there were a buyer of dreams, and if they would pay for your dream, your personally unattainable goal, you might be wiser now to sell.

Or you might choose to cherish your dream a while longer — to give it space, and give it scope and give it years, and all those elaborations and all the passion that might make it a rare commodity indeed in the jaded commerce of the rich and powerful.

Then you might sell it — for whatever a broker could obtain. Perhaps what you thought — and dreamed — it might be worth, perhaps for little more than a day's meal. Would you face that brutal, baseline assessment? Could you?

You'd get the highest price; you'd sell it utterly; you'd wrap it up in tissue of gold and the rarer tissue of trust and faith, and you'd release it forever — abandon it, packaged, whole, immaculate, to those with the means (you might justify the act to yourself) to carry out such plans; to those with the power; to those who might acquire the power — perhaps thanks to your dream.

But not yours any longer. You'll never know the end of your dream, because it belongs to someone else, now, and you've sold the right to speculate.

Out of your hands...out of your heart...and out of your dreams. The broker gives you no assurances. You'll have no more say in the matter. You've sold. He's bought. Done deal. You begin a new dream...if you can find one. If you've the heart left to dream again.

Such is the trade you've entered in.

And if one day you grow rich yourself — if you follow a dream that leads to wealth, or if you sell that one precious dream for a life's worth of riches, what can *you* do for dreams, but go to the self-same broker and say you're in the market?

You'll not get your own back. Gone is gone. Sold is sold. Someone else owns yours. But you might find those willing to sell.

Then...there are the thieves of dreams.

There was, among many in Ormisar, a thief named Kosvairi — not a violent

sort, such as robbers, not a clever sort, such as disguised themselves as priests and leaders and teachers, taking, in confidences given, that which the owner might not want to sell, let alone give.

But Kosvairi *was* clever. Kosvairi *might* have been a priest. He might have been a healer. He might have been a leader in the city — if he had not been born where he was born, in the quarter of Ormisar called Sahmidir, where dreams did not generally come — or if they did — were such brief ones, of a next meal or a drugged oblivion, that they had no market at all.

Kosvairi had only one dream — to be out of Sahmidir. And in that dream he discovered that he could take others' dreams — not cruelly, not even stealing the great ones, but just...little ones, a great many of them, and sometimes such simple, brief dreams as the owners never knew they owned, and never...quite...missed.

Little dreams. Ordinary dreams. Moderately-priced dreams. There began to be a great traffic in them as the city grew, as the economy of dreams produced its own, large, middle class of dream-consumers, those grown content enough — safe enough — to have to buy imagination. For them, any dream would do, that was not theirs and did not make them think of that class too poor to dream pleasant, useful dreams.

This consumer group desired the dreams of old women. Old men. The dreams of priests, of politicians, of merchants.

The dreams of fishermen, of miners, of goldsmiths and artisans.

The dreams of herb-sellers and of craftsmen and hunters and fishermen... of anyone who ever wanted to be...only for a moment...what he or she was not, who ever dreamed of having what he or she had never had.

Kosvairi could *use* none of those dreams, of course. He could hardly set himself up as a broker or a merchant of dreams: he had no credibility.

He was only sixteen.

Had he a conscience?

None. He had not dreamed of having. No one had told him he should have.

Had he magic?

Oh, exactly so. He was born with it — the son of a prostitute who died in his third year, but she was, perhaps, the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter and born in the dark of the moon; and perhaps conceived of a magician — or a thief — with like talents.

Kosvairi had no knowledge of his father — had no need of it: knowledge or father.

Kosvairi was also charming, handsome, self-assured — the sort of young person to whom others willingly cast their dreams, little reckoning of hazard: young women looking for their first love, older women, tired of rearing children, tired of their life, looking for a new one. Older men, tired of the aches and strains in aging muscle and bone, seeing themselves in his young

Artwork by James Balkovek

and strong body, observing the looks the young women cast him, imagining themselves the object of their gentle lust.

And Kosvairi was the sort of young person the well-meaning looked to reform, little knowing he had already marked them for theft and imagined exactly the broker who might buy, with a knock on his back door, in the small hours when the great gods slept and the little gods prowled the night.

And so Kosvairi wandered the midtown of Ormisar, went from booth to booth in the bazaar by day, and from window to window at night, stealing a little here, a little there — but he never left his victims bereft, always left them seeds for the next small dream.

He preyed where he would, was accustomed to stealth and deceit and craft.

No locks could keep dreams safe from him.

He approached his victims sometimes by broad daylight, as he did Samiuri, the potter's daughter. He told them some conjured tale, himself, to encourage them. He told his victims of the very person he hoped would buy their dreams — or at least, the sort of person — and then he listened. And remembered.

That was Kosvairi's talent.

He never expected the likes of Samiuri.

He never expected a woman who gave her dreams away.

There was a widow, he said one day to Samiuri, sitting in the comfortable shadows beside the potter's back door, while she spun the wheel, and he made his widow a person he'd known once, and said that she'd lost her husband at sea, to pirates...

And Samiuri dreamed him a stranger who would come to the widow at her garden gate, and who'd be from the sea himself, and who'd tell her of brave deeds and distant lands, and who'd carry her away on his ship of billowing sails, to meet with kings, and to visit a princess he once had known — so he said. But he was a pirate himself, and the widow knew it, and still she went.

On another day, he said to Samiuri: there was a merchant once, an honest, everyday merchant with a wife who had come from better circumstances and was discontent, while the merchant despaired of ever doing better in his trade...

And Samiuri dreamt him a traveler, who came with a marvelous box, and a key, and a trust for the merchant to keep for a year, which he did faithfully — but the wife grew curious, and became convinced it was stolen goods, for the Caliph's son had disappeared under very strange circumstances, just about the time the traveler appeared —

Be more practical, he said to Samiuri.

And Samiuri made a pot.

And Samiuri told him how she would someday, somehow, sell this wonderful pot to the Caliph's daughter's cook, who would cook so wonderfully well in it, she would become renowned and go with the Caliph's daughter when she married, as soon she must...

Much too practical, Kosvairi said. It requires a certain pot and *I* have not a penny to my name.

But, Samiuri said, buy this one. Or take it for me and tell the tale, and sell it for a great price. Then bring me the money for it.

But, Kosvairi almost said, what if I do not come back? What if I cheat?

The potter's daughter must have read his heart, for she said, "I doubt you would cheat."

Now, *why* did she doubt? Kosvairi asked himself. Was it because she believed in his character? No one else did. No one ever had.

Was it because she was a greater wizard than he was and had laid an enchantment on the pot, which would bring him absolute misfortune if he cheated? That might explain the dreams she so profligately dreamed.

So he went to the dream-merchants, and he sold the pot, and the dream...

And brought the money back again. She carefully counted out half and gave him the rest.

Which was greater justice then he'd expected.

Make another, he wished Samiuri; and she did.

This time it was a jar into which a young girl put all her dreams, and stopped the lid tight, and when she was an old, old woman, and had lived well, and become rich enough to do as she pleased, she could dip into this jar and find them all again.

But how can this girl become rich? Kosvairi asked.

Why, she should be wise, Samiuri answered.

And wonder of wonders, the jar did sell, and found a purchaser, of all people, in the Caliph's daughter. It was noised about the market, how the princess had found this absolutely marvelous and enchanted jar; and everyone wished to have one.

And the merchant, who had trebled his investment and more, offered to share his good fortune with Kosvairi — provided *he* had absolute claim to the next pot and story.

Kosvairi...declined the offer. Respectfully.

Make another, Kosvairi said to Samiuri that same afternoon. I could sell every one.

No, Samiuri said. Ask me something different.

So he did — though it came to him he was not *stealing* these dreams, but trafficking in them, and that matters had become very dangerous. For the Caliph's daughter's cook had bought the first jar — and the dream.

What if, he wondered to himself, the cook came into disfavor?

What if, he asked himself, the princess broke the jar?

The dream merchants began to besiege him, paying well for Samiuri's other dreams because they were good dreams, but also in hopes of securing the next pot. And other brokers began following him, seeking the source of these marvelous things, and when he evaded those hounds, they asked him directly and for certain clients, who could pay very well indeed...

✦ ✦ ✦

Kosvairi settled on the steps leading to the potter's back door, careful of his new-bought finery: a shirt of finest linen, embroidery on its sleeves and at its neck and along the hem that hung below his knees — the ultimate outward expression of prosperity. What those less clever failed to realize was that the long shirt hid the patches on the old trousers underneath, belying the need for new trousers as well.

The shirt was his first true investment since his prospects had taken their startling upswing. He didn't count on his good fortune to last. He knew better than to count on anything.

And he knew better then to invest in more than the shirt.

But he was a broker, now, with merchants clamoring for his product, and if he was to successfully bridge the gap between Sahmidir and midtown, he must look more the part, must have access to those most powerful of merchants, lest he lose his claim to Samiuri and her dreams altogether.

His face was known, now, among the lesser merchants, though Samiuri was

still — though precariously — his personal secret, and he knew he must be ready to defend his right to broker her dreams, when, as must inevitably happen, some other, more successful broker tracked her dreams to the source.

And he needed the shirt today when facing Samiuri. He needed to convince her to look upon him differently, to heed his advice, just this once.

One more pot. One more story.

For the Caliph himself.

It was his dream, his only dream, and it was within his reach. Even just his half of the commission would provide him more than enough to live in midtown for the rest of his life. He'd — taken an advance on his promise. He had the Caliph's coin in his purse.

And now he *had* to convince Samiuri to make another pot.

Of course, he could just buy another pot from another potter, could steal another dream, and sell them as one, but he sensed he'd lose Samiuri forever, if he did.

Of course, he could *afford* to lose Samiuri forever, but that was not his goal at all. And if he cheated he'd have to leave Ormisar, for once his deception was discovered — and he had no doubt it would, eventually, be discovered — the Caliph would have his head for a wall decoration, were he to stay in Ormisar.

So here he waited, and here he would stay until Samiuri agreed to make the pot and dream the dream.

✦ ✦ ✦

Kosvairi heard her voice before he saw her, heard the deeper tones of a man grown, the heavy tread of boots in the graveled alleyway masking the sweep of swaying skirt-hem as a couple walked toward him, a courting couple — one of whom was Samiuri.

And he felt — jealousy, which feeling was wasted utterly, there being no chance for anything other than business between himself and Samiuri, and therefore, he cast that wasted feeling away...

Until he saw the face of the man she was walking with.

Pansevi. The most powerful dream-broker in all Ormisar.

Kosvairi kept the anger from his face, kept the betrayal hidden deep within his belly as, rising from the step, he nodded acknowledgment to Pansevi's greeting, and as Samiuri placed her hand demurely into Pansevi's, who bowed over it as he would a grand lady's hand before he took his leave, promising to attend her tomorrow.

Kosvairi heard this, and knew the death of his personal dream. His one and only dream. He was known, now, in the palace. If he failed to fulfill the Caliph's commission, he'd never make another sale...to anyone.

"Well, Kosvairi?" Somehow his name never sounded quite the same when Samiuri spoke it. He looked up the short distance to where she stood at the top of the stairs. "Are you here?" she asked, with a smile that was everything of welcome and nothing of guilt. "Or are you away?"

"Here," he said, shortly, and followed her inside, where her potter's wheel sat empty.

While Samiuri left to make tea and change into the mannish trousers and tunic she wore while working, Kosvairi settled onto the vast pillow he had made his over the past weeks, not curled, as he was wont to do, like a young boy, but cross-legged and straight-backed, as a man prepared to conduct business.

He'd rarely seen Samiuri in women's clothing, never in anything as fine as she'd been wearing when she arrived. When he'd first passed this back door, late one night, and felt her dreams and seen her slumped in exhausted slumber behind her wheel, he'd believed her to be a man, such was the strength and the power of the dream, such she appeared to be by her clothing, and the dark fall of hair and the strong hands which was all he'd seen of her.

She'd wakened then, sensed him standing at the door left open to the cool night air, and looked up, and the manly impression had flown away forever. Eyes as clear-blue as the sky, features beyond such feeble words as beautiful...if Kosvairi had ever dared dream a dream beyond the One Dream, it would be of such a woman.

But she was older than he. She had amused herself with him, had used him to gain notoriety among the merchants, and now was preparing to transfer her loyalties — and her skills — to Pansevi.

She returned, then, giving him no further time to wonder at what she'd agreed with Pansevi. She handed him a steaming mug, and settled herself behind the wheel.

"So, Kosvairi," she said, setting the wheel to spinning, "what brings you here?"

As if she didn't know. But it was the same each time, until the question became part of each visit. As if there were priorities to maintain, an etiquette of their encounters.

But this time:

"The Caliph."

She cocked her head at him past the rising mountain of clay.

"He's commissioned a dream-pot."

Her strong hands lifted; her foot stopped pumping; the wheel slowed...

"And where do you intend to get this...*dream* pot?"

"From you, of course." All his carefully planned arguments were gone, vanished with the appearance of Pansevi. "But then, it hardly matters, does it? You've arranged — "

Her fists slammed the clay tower flat. "I've arranged *nothing!*"

"Nothing?" Hope surged. "Please, Samiuri, just one more. It's all I will ever need. All you'll ever need."

"I need nothing." She reached behind her stool, straightened and flung a pouch at him. His fingers caught it without his giving them conscious thought. "There." she said. "Take it all and get out. I told you, no more!"

"I can't, Samiuri. Wouldn't dare, now they all know who I am — Who you are."

She stared at him a long moment, scraped the clay from her wheel and threw it into a pot, then palmed another mass from beneath a different cover.

"Tell me, Kosvairi. What would you do if dreams were free?"

"Free?" His voice squeaked, he was that startled. Then he managed a weak chuckle. "But you're just making a joke, aren't you?" She just stared at him, and he repeated weakly, "You are joking."

Her eyes dropped and she threw the double fistful of clay onto the wheel and started it spinning.

"There was a city once," she said, and as she spoke, her strong hands formed the mound as it spun, drawing its sides up without any preliminary forming. "A city much like Ormisar save in one way: its people had no dreams at all, and everyone was content."

Why? Kosvairi almost said, but refrained, knowing this was The Dream he had requested, and prompting questions always contaminated the best dreams.

And Samiuri's dreams were always the best.

"This city had its Sahmidir. Oh, it wasn't called Sahmidir, but it was the

same. Every city has a Sahmidir. But while the rats infested its Sahmidir, though the people there were starved and cold and dirty, they were content, because they had no dreams at all, and without dreams, they could imagine having nothing better, only what they had already. There was no disappointment, no bitterness because there was no hope. What was, was.

"And the midtown folk were equally content. For the same reason and because they couldn't imagine themselves living in Sahmidir, and therefore, they had no fear: nothing to run from, no urge to better themselves. What was, was.

"And the nobles, and the merchants and the Caliph, himself. All did the same thing day after day, year in and year out, because they could imagine doing nothing else. What was, was.

"And then, one day, a stranger came into the City. A Merchant of Mystery. But no one was interested in his wares. They could not be surprised at what he pulled from hats and when he cut a woman in half or made milk disappear, for they never wondered could he or couldn't he or how did he do it.

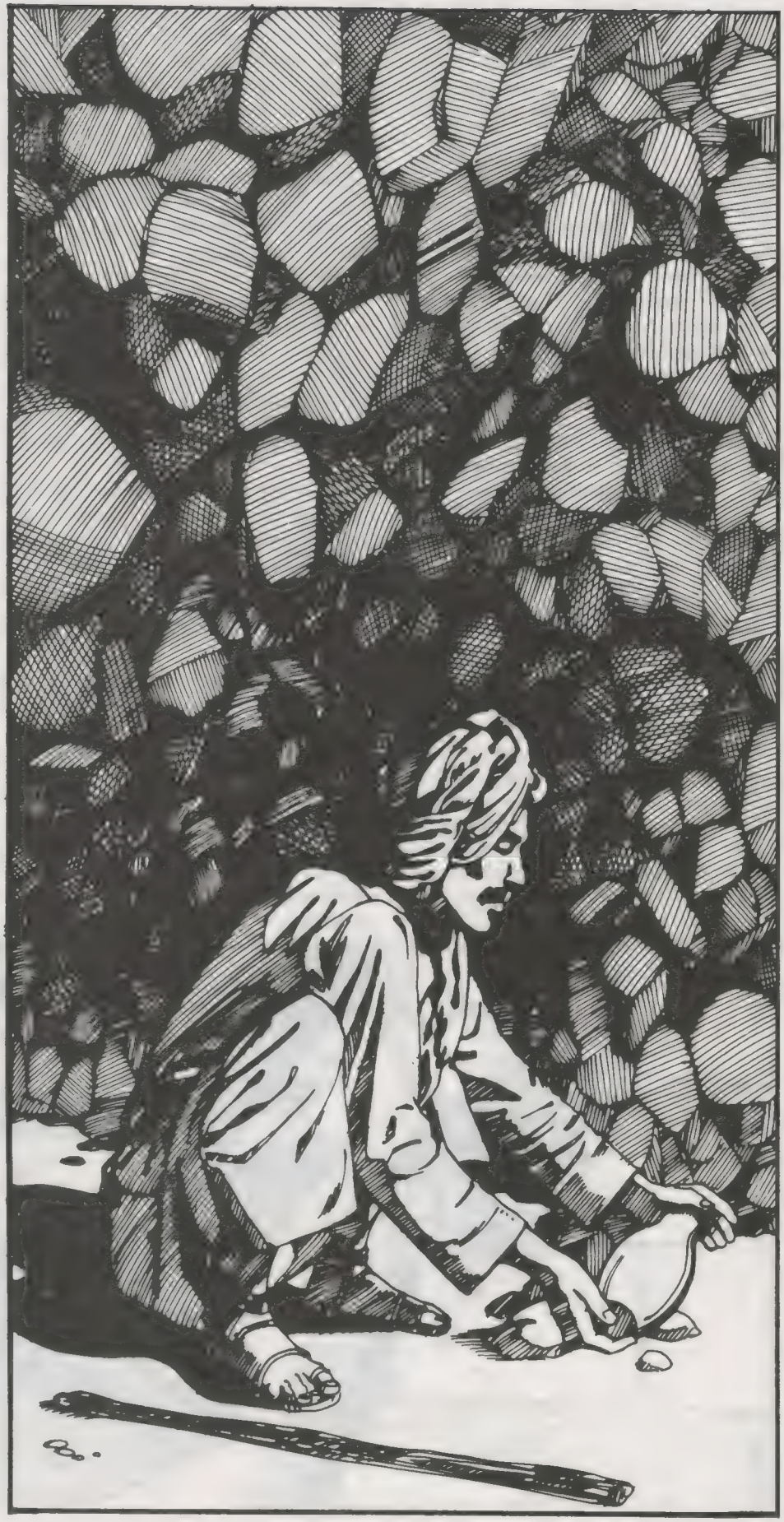
"What was, was.

"And therefore, the Merchant of Magic made very little when he passed his hat about. His product held nothing that could be weighed and measured, it wasn't a musical performance whose accuracy could be measured against other performances, nor a reenactment play with actors whose delivery could be judged for error. But each person who stopped gave him a penny, to acknowledge his efforts, and to help him on to the next city...except for the final man, who, looking into the hat, evaluated the number of pennies and calculated the Merchant would lack sufficient fund to make the next city. As he had sufficient on him to make up the difference, he did so. It would not, after all, change his life, one way or the other...

✦ ✦ ✦

"But the Merchant, touched by the man's generosity, took a pot from his wagon and handed it to the man, telling him it was the most valuable thing he owned, that it contained all manner of riches, and that he was very happy to give it to such a kind and generous man.

"Such words meant little to the man, but he accepted the gift, having been taught manners, and said his thank



Artwork by James Balkovek

you and took the pot back to his house with him and set it beside the door.

"That night, the Magician disappeared from the town square, and was never seen again. Not there, not in the next city.

"But the pot remained. Day after day, the man passed it on his way to the man of business for whom he kept accounts, and night after night he passed it on his way back into his home.

"And then, one night, he sat beside his fire, completing a line of figures; and, of a sudden on that night, he found himself looking at that pot and thinking about the Magician and what he'd said about the pot and the riches it contained.

"The man went to the pot and for the first time explored it, seeking an opening, of which there was none, shaking it for sound, of which there was none.

"Puzzled, now, though he did not recognize the feeling or put name to it, he picked up the pot and dropped it. Once. Twice. Then he dropped it from a greater height.

"And still the pot remained intact.

"The man found a mallet in his kitchen and struck the pot hard and with all his might. And made not so much as a crack.

"There was a cliff just outside the City. The next day, the man left his house, but he did not go to work. He took the pot to the cliff and threw it down to the sharp rocks below. Then he climbed down, which greatly taxed his strength. But once there, he found the pot. Intact.

"That night, he sat again and stared at the pot, placed the pot in the fire and waited for it to explode. But the fire burned down, and he fell asleep there beside his darkened hearth.

"And that night, the man dreamed.

"He dreamed of the pot, lying in pieces, and of people all around the city crying and laughing. Of fights and parades, of fear and triumph...and of a new man as Caliph.

"Himself.

"He woke up, and there in the hearth, exactly as he'd seen in his dream, lay the pot, shattered into a million pieces.

"And all around him, the City rang with terrified screams as the dreams of rich and poor alike mingled, dreams of death and of hope, of fear and of greed."

✦ ✦ ✦

As Samiuri finished her story, the spinning pot slowed, her index finger sliding up the inside, finishing the narrow neck with a fanned edge. That same finger touched the air at the center of the top. The simple, golden brown of the clay shimmered in a sudden shaft of sunlight.

Samiuri nodded, picked the pot up and casually tossed it toward Kosvairi. Horrified, he tried to catch it, to absorb the impact upon the soft clay in his arms....

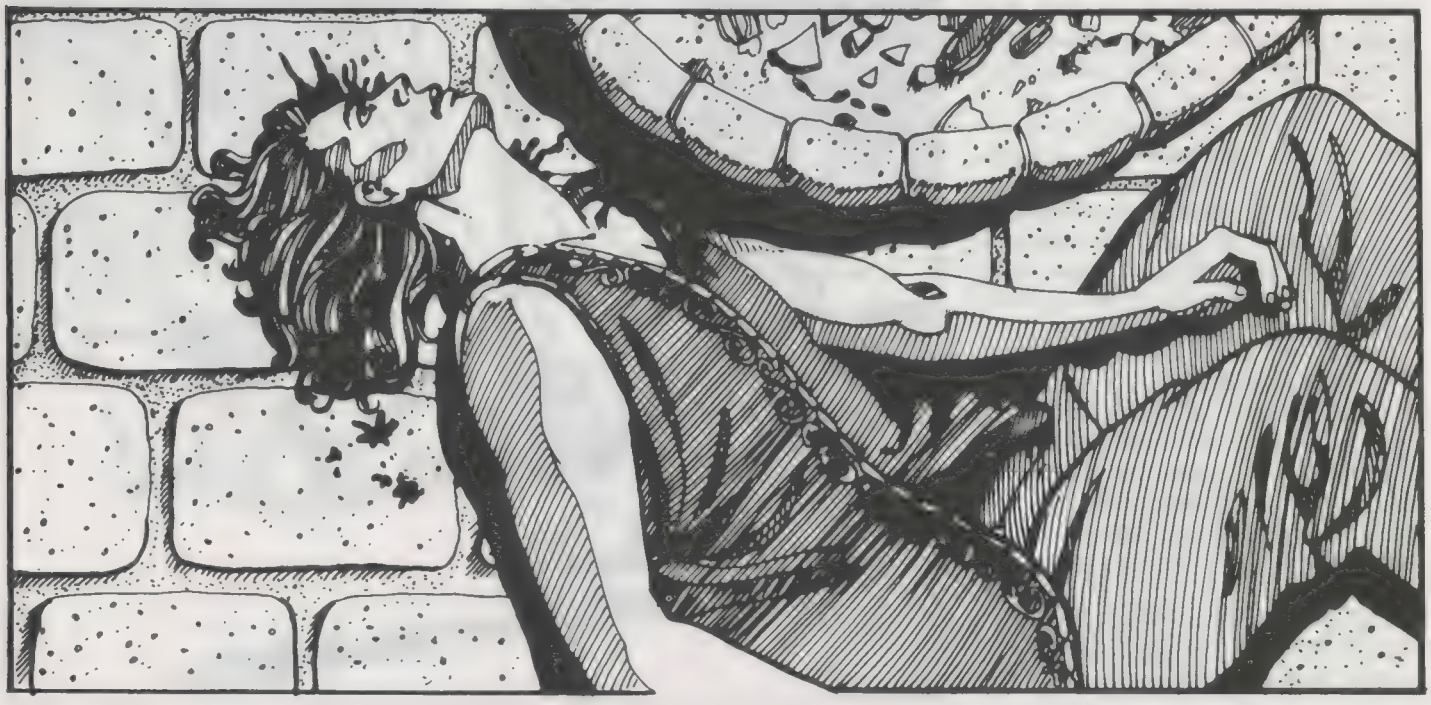
The pot was hard. As hard as if it had been fired. And the top, where he'd seen her finger disappear, was solid. The pot, just like the one Samiuri had described, had no top, no stopper — no opening.

"That is the final dream, broker, and the final pot. Go and do with it as you please. Do not bother returning, for I shan't be here."

"But —"

"Dreams were not meant to be bought and sold, Kosvairi. Each man and each woman was meant to dream, and to hope, and to fear the consequences of those dreams and hopes...each to be the holder of his own conscience. It is the responsibility of the rich to manage their own eccentricities, that allow the beautiful and delicate in their fine houses and their elaborate ambitions to rule their lives. It is their own responsibility to cultivate true charities and true sensibilities as they grow richer and desire more and more delicacy and more and more novelty. It should not fall on others to provide that sensibility. The gods granted humanity eyes to see, and mind to reason and heart to imagine. What each man and each woman does with these abilities is what determines their worth in the marketplace of the human soul."

She spoke of things beyond Kosvairi's sixteen-year understanding of life, beyond his reckoning of Ormisar...but not beyond the scope of the dreams large and small he'd brokered for years. Kosvairi had never dreamed those dreams, but he'd heard them in his ears, in his head and in his heart, and remembering them all together and mingled with Samiuri's words brought great confusion to his understanding of life.



Artwork by James Balkovek

He wasn't certain he believed in souls. Wasn't certain he was yet free of Samiuri's enthrallment. Did not dare — for his very life's sake — agree with the premise she extended now, that he was wrong to sell dreams — even those freely given.

Was it then *right* that he be stuck forever in Sahmidir?

Find other options, her story suggested. *Dream them. Live those dreams.*

But why did she say these things now — when to refuse the Caliph's commission would mean his certain death?

He couldn't listen now. Couldn't question: he was a broker, now, and brokers did not let their product confuse their business sense.

"But I *must* see you again," he said, practically, but with desperation clouding his heart. "The Caliph — the money —"

Samiuri waved her hand. "It's yours. All of it is yours. Goodbye, Kosvairi."

And so it ended. Kosvairi took the pot in his arms and went to his hearthside in the ruins of the old smithy in Sahmidir, where he'd lived all his remembered life, and he set the pot beside the cold hearth and stared at it, and thought about the dream.

And he thought of the princess and the cook, and of the old widow, who bought the dream of pirates and hadn't been seen since, of the Caliph's missing son, and of the second dream as yet unsold...

And he was shaken.

Taking the pot in his arms, he walked the streets of Ormisar, of Sahmidir, and midtown and even skirted the edge of the Caliph's palace.

And for the first time in that remembered life, there were no dreams to steal. Not of any size. Not even of tomorrow's meal or of a rat-free bed.

And he was frightened.

He returned to his hearthside and made excuses: his talent was gone. He could no longer steal the dreams, and that was why he sensed none.

But he knew that wasn't true. He knew where those dreams were, and all the other dreams, past and future. And he knew what must happen should he fall asleep.

Then he remembered that, in the dream, the pot only shattered when the man wished it to be shattered. The man dreamed the dream only when he wished to free that which huddled inside.

He could escape now, leaving the pot here, perhaps buried, before the Caliph realized he had forsaken his agreement.

He could sell the pot and the dream to the Caliph before the Caliph ever realized no one in his city had dreams any longer — and leave before the Caliph slept and released both dreams and madness within his city; for once that pot was opened, no one then would ask for the dream-brokers, no one then would buy the sanitized, perfect dream — they'd share instead, all of them, low and high, the dream of success and wealth in Ormisar mingled with the nightmare of failure in Sahmidir.

Or perhaps the Caliph might see in Samiuri's final dream a better state for his Ormisar; a steady-state existence in which he and his children and his children's children would never be deposed. Perhaps the Caliph would have the pot hidden away, and dream each night of its safekeeping.

And the nights of the city would remain as cold and as empty as they'd been tonight.

And as Kosvairi sat and stared at his pot, the Caliph's men — who had seen him wandering the City with the pot — burst into Kosvairi's hovel and beat him with their fists and clubs, leaving him for dead.

But he was not dead. He heard them talking amongst themselves and knew who they were, knew why they were there, and that they took the pot from him to give the Caliph.

When he awakened for true, he felt no pain, so they must not have struck such heavy blows as it had felt, but the pot was gone, as he knew it would be. The pot would be in the Caliph's hands, now, and in the morning, it would be shattered into thousands of pieces, with or without Samiuri's dream.

The dream was the pot. And the dream would be dreamt.

And there would be no safe place at all for Kosvairi. His head would decorate the Caliph's wall.

Kosvairi rose to his feet and walked the dark streets of Ormisar, headed for the outside. And as he passed the dark houses, he sensed dreams once again. Endless images filling the darkness all about him.

He began to run, from the joy and from the fear and from the madness of those dreams. He reached the outside of the gates, and the cliff by the sea — and found Samiuri waiting.

✦ ✦ ✦

They discovered the young thief lying beside a cold hearth in the heart of Sahmidir. Like so many in Ormisar, he had been beaten to death during the night of madness. He'd had nothing of worth. His attackers had not been thieves themselves, only crazed.

Those who had dreamed the truth, who dreamed what might be happening, had stayed inside that night and waited for the madness to end. Not out of fear, but out of assurance that the madness itself was self-limiting, and therefore, not to be feared, but endured.

And those who dreamed true compared their dreams and discovered there was after all no truth, only...speculation.

But there was one, one of those true-dreamers who found the young thief known as Kosvairi; a true-dreamer who found, among the ashes in young Kosvairi's hearth, fragments of a pot, shards of golden brown shot with streaks the color of blood...and *that* one knew there was a truth.

She palmed a shard...and smiled.

❄

C.J. Cherryh has had something in the neighborhood of forty books published in both the fantasy and science fiction fields. She has won three Hugos and her works have been translated into at least ten languages. She lives in Oklahoma City.

Jane S. Fancher would not have predicted, ten years ago, that she would end up an sf writer, but here she is with three published novels and another upcoming series. After having spent the majority of her life in Washington state, she now lives in Oklahoma City. She and C.J. Cherryh are joint guests of honor at the March 1995 Fantasy Worlds Festival in Berkeley CA.

David A. Cherry is a well-known sf and fantasy cover artists, the former president of the artists' organization ASFA, and an even-more-former lawyer. He'll be Artist Guest of Honor this year at Balticon in April and ConDuit in May and will be a featured speaker for the Associates of the Smithsonian. He has some trading cards coming out as part of a 96-card deck from FPG Publishing. Cherry lives in Oklahoma with his wife and two daughters

James Balkovek heads Black Eagle Productions, a graphic arts sutdio in Antioch, California. He has illustrated numerous children's and educational books and has worked as art director for various periodical publications.

The Chocolate Genie

by Ginger Strivelli

Artwork by Lori Deitrick

Arabella gathered the ingredients that she would need to make a chocolate cake. She carefully measured out the flour and sugar without incident, but when she opened the can of cocoa an odd puff of smoke rose from the can.

Arabella held the can up to peer inside. She shook her head to clear the bats from the belfry and returned to the task at hand. She added the other ingredients and began to stir the thick mixture. She forced the wooden spoon around and around the overflowing bowl.

"I wish I had an electric mixer," Arabella said to herself.

Just then her old wooden spoon became a hand mixer. She held it up and studied it closely but before she had a chance to question her sanity, a smell of smoke distracted her. She opened the oven door but found nothing burning in there as she had forgotten to preheat the oven. She shut the door and turned the knob to 350 degrees.

Arabella sniffed the air…she smelled only chocolate now. Shaking her head yet again, she flipped the switch of the mixer and finished mixing the cake batter. Filling two pans she then put them into the oven, cleaned up her mess, made the icing, and finally sat down to read the paper while awaiting her cake's baking.

"Oh, I wish I had thought to add that bag of chocolate chips to the batter," she told her old black cat as it jumped into her lap.

The cat nearly got stepped on as Arabella jumped up to see if the cake was burning, when she smelled the smoke. It wasn't burning but it was ready to come out of the oven. She placed it on the countertop to cool, finished reading the paper, iced the cake and cut herself a slice. Just after taking her first bite, she leaped from her seat to the trash can. Sure enough, the empty chocolate chip bag lay atop the broken eggshells. "Did I forget mixing them in?" she mused out loud.

Arabella turned around to see the cat licking the icing off her slice of cake. "Oh, you dreadful cat… I wish you had better manners!" Arabella exclaimed angrily.

"Oh pardon me!" the cat started as he stood up on his hind legs. "I'll just tidy up this mess, Mistress, then I will serve you another piece of your terribly delicious chocolate cake."

"What!?!" Arabella shrieked, looking around to find the cause of the reoccurring smoke.

"Here you go, Mistress, a new slice of cake for you and one for myself, that is if you don't mind my joining you," the bewitched cat said.

"I must be mad! I wish the police would just come and take me to a nice quiet institution, before I start seeing dragons and trolls!" Arabella said, hiding her face in her hands.

"Oh, dear me, you mustn't upset yourself so. Here, let me get you an aspirin."

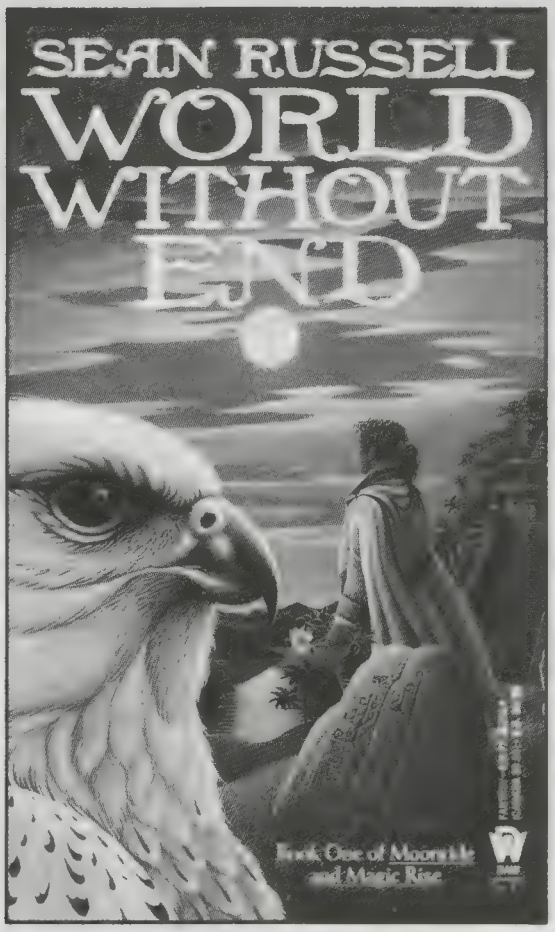
Of course, the police never came, since Arabella had used up her three wishes and the Chocolate Genie had gone away, but she did live out the rest of her bewildered days with a very polite cat.

❄

Ginger Strivelli lives in North Carolina with her husband and three children. She has had several children's non-fiction pieces published, but this is her first fiction sale.

Lori Deitrick has had work published in *Aboriginal Science Fiction* and *Amazing Stories*. She shares a studio in Knoxville, Tennessee with her husband David (another artist) and 3 children, one a newly-adopted baby.

THE LOST SECRETS OF THE MAGES...



The age of Mages is over, and all the secrets of their magical arts are thought to be lost to the world. There are even those who suspect that the last of the great Mages spent their final years scrupulously eradicating all traces of their craft from the pages of history—insuring that their art will never be practiced again. It is the dawn of a new era: an age of reason, science and exploration, and Tristam Flattery is one of its most promising young naturalists.

But when Tristam is summoned to the royal court of Farrland to try to revitalize a failing species of plant which seems to have mysterious, almost magical, medicinal properties—a plant without which, he is told, the aging king will surely die—he soon realizes that he has been drawn into the heart of a political struggle which spans generations, a conflict which threatens the very foundations of his civilization. And before long, Tristam is caught in the grip of a destiny which will lead him to the ends of the known world—a voyage of discovery that has more to do with magic than with science...

Book One of *Moontide and Magic Rise*

WORLD WITHOUT END

Sean Russell

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DAW FANTASY

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC

Artwork by Gail Butler

On the last night of the workshop, when all the seminars were over and the dead-dog parties were in full swing, Keighley leaned far out of Lisa Waters's window to catch a breath of air and caught a story instead. The hotel, a fishing lodge a century old, had real casement windows that opened outward. Far below her the Feather River glittered like a thread of silver in the moonlight, and she thought of an undine swimming upriver with the salmon. She pulled her head back in and began threading her way through her colleagues toward the door.

"Keighley, are you all right?" Lisa asked, her arms full of ice buckets.

"Got an idea." Keighley snagged a Calistoga for the road and went to her own room, powered up the laptop, and began plotting.

By the time the party noises were dying away, she had the basic concepts pinned down and a handful of felicitous phrases stored up for future use. There were one or two details that hadn't been cleared up yet, but she could safely put them on the back burner till morning. She backed up her file, finger-combed her hair and put it in a rough braid, and crawled into bed.

She woke out of dreamless sleep to the light of a thin decrescent moon setting in the West. The parties had ended and the lodge was so silent that Keighley thought she could hear the fish jumping in the river below. And a thin thread of music.

At first she wasn't sure she was hearing it and not imagining it. No, there it was, a melody for dancing, played jauntily on a flute or maybe it was an oboe. It was really very difficult to hear.

She turned over to look at the clock-radio by her bedside. No, it was off. Some other radio, elsewhere in the hotel? She'd searched the dial in vain for a classical music station when she'd arrived. She'd inquire later. Turn over again with a thrash and a flop, review the plot — and ha, one of the unresolved elements had just gone resolved. She made herself sit up long enough to

scribble "A keeps M from castle till too late" on the notepad, semi-legible in the wan moonlight, but it would trigger her recollection in the morning. She turned over a third time and went back to sleep.

She woke again, when the sun was nearly up and the birds were sounding off, with the tingling sensation that meant it was no use trying to catch any more winks. The nervous system was waking and gearing up for work. Hurry, hurry, get up, write that story down, lady, write that mother down. Obediently her feet hit the floor. Down in the river a solitary fisherman in waders and a red cap cast his line into the middle of the stream. She brewed tea on the automatic coffee maker and sat down and wrote and wrote till breakfast time.

The front desk was thick with people checking out; the dining room was almost deserted. The teenaged waitperson who brought Keighley's breakfast had time to chat.

"A classical music station? No, ma'am, not that I ever heard of. The junior college used to have a station that broadcast a little of everything, but its funding got cut. One of the other guests could have brought a tape player, I guess."

After breakfast the checkout lines were as long as before — and at least six hours of driving ahead of her, while the undine cooled her heels in the fishcart. She went upstairs and called the desk on the house phone. "Would it be all right if I stayed on a few more days?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, no problem," the desk clerk said, so enthusiastically that Keighley's suspicions were confirmed: this place was only just paying for itself, if that. It was a beautiful place, a sometime fishing lodge built around the turn of the century out of huge planks of redwood. The fishing was great in the Feather River, so they told her, but getting down the steep banks to where the fish were was a nontrivial problem. Whoever had found, or built, a trail of only moderate slope from a wide shelf down to the riverbed had recognized a resource worth money in the bank.

But times were bad now, and the young couple who ran the place had an anxious look. When things got tough enough, even the most fanatical of fishermen run out of disposable income. A few of them still came here, but Keighley got the impression Lisa's writers' workshop had been the first time the lodge had been full in a long while. She could well afford to give the kids a few extra room-nights. She pulled the little table nearer the window and got back to work.

By dinnertime, with the last workshopper coaxing his Volkswagen up the driveway onto Highway 70, the place was empty. Keighley's footsteps on the stairs fell into halls full of silence, and the mellow redwood echoed the sound like a well-aged concert hall.

Karen Connor popped up behind the front desk as Keighley came into the lobby. "Uh, Ms. Bracton," she said, "since you're the only guest left — maybe you'd like to have your meals with us in the staff lounge? That way, you'd have some company —"

And you won't have to open the dining room at all. And Keighley, for whom solitude was like bread, smiled and said, "Oh, yes, I'd love to." You can get along without bread for a few days.

The family gathered in the staff lounge was a largish one, Chris and Karen Connor and their three small children, and two of Karen's sisters who waited on tables and made beds, and a couple of cousins who did gardening and odd jobs when they weren't in school. The depression had hit these rural areas hard, and the Connors could have employed another dozen eager youngsters if they'd had the business to pay for them.

The last seat at the table was filled by an old man with bright blue eyes and laugh lines scored deep into his face. Seeing him hang his red woolen cap on the antlered hatrack by the door, Keighley said, "I think I saw you down in the river this morning. How was the fishing?"

"It was fine, thank you," the old man said. "I'm Jerry Kerrigan, pleased to meet you. I did well enough that that's what we're having for dinner."

To which the eldest Connor child said, "Aw, gee, Mom, trout *again*?" To which his mother answered, "You can have scrambled eggs and toast," and the child subsided at once.

Trout is free, Keighley noted, *and eggs are home-grown — I knew I heard a rooster go off this morning — and toast is cheap. These kids really are operating on a shoestring. We need to find them some business.* And she put the matter on another back burner, to simmer till done.

"Thank you, Lord," Chris Connor said as he sat down, "for giving us trout, *again*." The trout was delicious, not many hours dead and dusted with golden-fried bread crumbs. Keighley kept up her end of the conversation with tales of places she had visited, and escaped the coffee and cigarettes (remarkable, how many people in the outlands still smoked) to return to the undine, who had painted herself into a corner halfway between Amiens and the sea.

By the time she reached a stopping place it was full dark, and she was hearing the music again.

She powered down her laptop and the faint noises of the disk drive died away. She even closed the window, to shut out the faint night noises. It was music, dammit, she couldn't be making this up. She listened for some minutes, trying in vain to identify the piece, or even to peg the composer. Late nineteenth or early twentieth century, if she was any judge: Sibelius? Elgar? — no, more guts than Elgar. Shostakovich maybe? It seemed to be a suite of dances for — gosh, you couldn't really identify the solo instrument. It could be anything from violin to theremin, and whatever accompaniment it had couldn't make it through the walls.

Or was it coming through the walls at all? She opened the window. The wind rustling in the trees, the river chuckling over a patch of rapids, the hoot of an owl. Definitely not coming from outside, echoing across the river valley from some solitary transistor on the far bank — which was damn near straight up and down and thick with timber. She closed the window again.

No, it was definitely inside, not outside. She opened the door and listened in the hallway. Nothing there. She closed the door again. Oh, yes, definitely in here: a piece like a Baroque gigue, a foot-tapping beat, a piece to dance to, or a march for three-legged Martians. She sat and simply listened till it was over and the next movement began.

Let's see. Nothing in the hall meant it had to be either under her or over her. She was on the second of three floors,

by Dorothy J. Heydt

and over her was another guest room. Under her — pause to map the layout of halls and stairways in her head — under her was probably the lobby. And this old building had old-fashioned keys that turned right around in the lock, and were left in the keyholes between guests, European-fashion. Keighley slipped into the hall, soundless as an old gray ghost, and padded upstairs.

Her room number was 14, but the one directly above was 22. She checked her mental map to make sure. (So the third floor wasn't the same shape as the second; this wasn't a straight-sided highrise.) What would she find inside? A solitary flautist snatching practice time from the routine of the day and the disdain of relatives? Or a classical-music wannabee, listening in the dead of night to music unacceptable to his peers? (You could bring in far-distant radio stations at night. The ionosphere lifted and reflected signals from further away; something like that. Surreptitious Sibelius. Bootleg Beethoven. *Samizdat* Shostakovich. The kid could probably use a friend — or at least a good set of headphones. The key was still in the lock on this side. She turned the knob and pushed the door open.

Artwork by Gail Butler

And nothing. Not a mouse stirring, not a sound. She flicked on the lights. The little room — it was a single, with a narrow bed in one corner and photos of memorable fish on the walls — was as bare of life as the dark side of the moon. Keighley closed the door quietly and padded downstairs again.

She came down the main staircase cautiously, walking at the edge of the treads near the banisters. The stairs were solid and didn't squeak — but the high-ceilinged lobby, big enough for the great hall of a small castle, magnified every sound.

But still no music, still no sign of life. No one behind the desk, where a single light burned and threw whole Arabian-Nights-full of suggestive shadows across the lobby. They weren't expecting any business till next weekend, if then. No sound but her own breathing. Keighley went upstairs in a sour mood. She didn't like mysteries, not in real life; even with fictional whodunits she tended to peek in the back and find out whodunit. A mystery without its mystery becomes a novel of manners, which she did like.

Maybe some previous guest had left his false teeth somewhere in her room and it was picking up radio frequencies. That seemed as good an explanation as any, at this point.

But — she'd been listening to this bodiless wireless for some hours now. And there had never been a single commercial. Not even a station break. Come now, you *had* to have station breaks, the FCC said so.

"Maybe it's all in my head," she muttered aloud, and the seasoned redwood took up the sound and made lace of it all up and down the hall. "But I don't have a bullet in my brain." At least, none that she know of, though there had been that one spectacular party Saturday night, and a spectacular headache the following morning. Solemnly she felt her temples, ran her fingers over her scalp under her hair. No sign of an entry wound. No, her headache had been as she thought, a

matter of too much wine and not enough water, and six cups of tea had fixed it.

She opened her door. The music was louder now; if she'd had a good tape recorder with a sound meter, she bet she could get a reading on it. This was definitely a piece for solo flute. Bamboo flute was her guess, a sound rough around the edges, organic, like the song of a marsh bird practicing up for Carnegie Hall. A wandering melody, free-form, not unlike Debussy's *Syrinx*, if Debussy had been listening to a lot of Gershwin the night before. "Rest in the riddle, rest; why not?" she told herself, and put herself still unpersuaded to bed. By the time she dropped off she had decided it was the ghost of a radio station from early in the century, say the early twenties when they used a lot of unpaid local talent and lived in happy ignorance of the FCC. Or else it was time-traveling. Maybe when she finished the undine story she could get another one out of this. (But her last conscious thought was a wish that someone could have written down that gigue.)

Early morning brought the usual chorus of birds and the Connors' rooster, and once they fell silent Keighley heard a low droning sound, more like a human voice than an instrument, humming little tunes over and over. Keighley finally twigged that they were the separate parts of a several-part canon. They faded away into silence before they could become irritating. The sun had just risen over the mountains. She'd read a story once called "The Ghosts of the Heaviside Layer", ghosts trapped in the ionosphere, broadcasting when the sun was down. She couldn't remember who had written it.

The undine was headed for the finish line now, neck-and-neck with the King of the Franks and the bishop's clerk, so Keighley skipped breakfast and lunch with the Connors. Karen's younger sister brought her tea and muffins and sandwiches and lemonade. By midafternoon the draft was done; it needed to cool now for twenty-four hours or so before she could take it up objectively for polishing. She could even go home now, rescue Rhadamanthos from the ignominy of dry cat food, gravity-fed from a plastic tower and good for a week and a half, but not as succulent as the canned stuff. Instead, she made a phone call to a friend in San Francisco.

Then she went in search of adult Connors, and found Chris raking leaves out of the front lawn. "I phoned a friend of mine and suggested he come up here for a few days. Can he have Room 15, next to mine?"

"No problem," Chris said; but she could see whole generations of speculation flicker over his face: the fact that 14 and 15 shared a connecting door; that Keighley was certainly of age and with any luck too old; that it was officially none of his business in any case and these were supposed to be the nineties. "Will he be here in time for dinner?"

Keighley looked at her watch. "He's driving from San Francisco and he'll probably have to go through the rush-hour traffic. I don't think so."

And at dinnertime there was no sign of him. Jerry Kerrigan was missing too, and instead of trout Karen served a very authentic French cassoulet. *Sausage is cheap, beans are cheap, and geese are home-grown.* Keighley stirred the ideas on her back burner; some of them were beginning to simmer. She let the conversation drift from her completed story (with sidebars on what an undine was and who the Franks were) to fantasy fiction in general to urban legends to haunted houses.

"You could use a ghost or two here, I imagine," she said. "The Psychic Research Society and CSICOP could fight over who got the best rooms. A poltergeist could be fun, if you could train it just to knock and rattle, and not break things. Hey, Melanie —" this was Karen's younger sister — "how old are you? Seventeen? A bit late. Have you ever had moments when you're so mad you feel you could explode, and the dishes start rattling on the shelves with nobody touching them?"

"No, darn it," Melanie said. "Though if I went into the pantry and stomped hard, I bet I could fake it."

"No poltering in my pantry," Karen said.

"*Has* anyone ever seen a ghost in this place? It's old enough — at least around here. You know what they say in Europe? 'America is the place where a hundred miles is a short distance and a hundred years is a long time.'"

"You'd have to ask Jerry," Chris said. "Only he had to go up to Quincy today to do some paperwork. He owned the lodge before we did, you see; sold it to us five years ago and retired to do some serious fishing. But you've noticed he hangs around a lot, advising us — keeping the kitchen stocked with trout — I don't know what we'd do without him. Ask him if there are any ghosts, or any ghost stories. We sure haven't seen anything."

"Or heard anything? Because I could've sworn I heard music playing Sunday night, and there doesn't seem to be anywhere it could have come from."

"Oh, yeah, I remember you asking about that," Melanie said.

"So you could have a musical ghost. Or I could be hallucinating. If I had a bullet in my brain it would be easier to account for."

"Ewww," Melanie said. "What've bullets got to do with it?"

"Ever hear of Dmitri Shostakovich? Russian composer, beginning to past the middle of this century. When he was a young man he fought in World War I, and he got shot in the head."

"Did he die?" the middle Connor child asked.

"No, dear, not then; he lived to a ripe old age. But there he was with a bullet in his brain, and the Soviet doctors of that time weren't good enough to try and take it out.

"So he went back to civilian life with this thing pressing on his brain, and it gave him auditory hallucinations. That means," she said to the middle child, "he didn't see things that weren't there, like little green men: he *heard* things that weren't there, like music. Out of thin air — only really it came out of his head. Beautiful melodies that no one had ever heard before. He could write them down, play them on the piano, or score them for a hundred-piece orchestra. So he made his living that way."

"Was that cheating?" said the oldest child.

"Of course not. It was his music, after all; it came out of his head and he didn't get it from anybody else. So years later, when Soviet medical technique had improved a lot, they came to him and said, 'Comrade Shostakovich, we think we can safely take that bullet out of your brain now.'

"And he said whatever the Russian is for 'Are you nuts? That bullet is my bread and butter.' And he kept it, and it gave him music for the rest of his life."

"So he lived happily ever after?"

"Well, yes." (No point in telling the kid about the pitfalls of trying to be creative under the Soviet government.)

"And his son is a famous conductor and his grandson is a famous pianist. But he died in Russia, so that can't be him in Room 14."

Ooops. She had said rather more than she intended, and several Connors were looking at her strangely. She was saved, appropriately, by a bell: the doorbell. "That'll be George."

George Karpathy was a big blocky man with squared shoulders and bushy hair, like a caricature of a commissar — or a Bohemian Hungarian artist. Keighley introduced him merely as a friend who needed a rest. Not wishing to pick up the dropped thread of the previous conversation, she did not describe him as a musician.

George was a first-rate musicologist and a competent orchestrator. He wrote brilliant reviews for the Bay Area papers and made a few bucks on the side doing musical arrangements. He was not imaginative.

But he could take a suggestion and run with it, so Keighley would have to be careful what she said to him.

"It's — what — eight o'clock. George, did you get any dinner?"

"I had some Chicken McNuggets, consumed between lane changes in the Sacramento rush hour. I'm not sure you could call it dining."

The cassoulet was still warm, sitting over a tea candle. George finished it off and followed it, European fashion, with a salad that had still been rooted in the garden when he rang the doorbell. "Mrs. Connor, why are you not earning an impressive salary in a small but important San Francisco restaurant?"

"I like it here," Karen said, but her eyes were wistful.

"So what —" George began as they crossed the lobby, and broke off to listen to the resonance. "What a nice hall! I'd like to put about a fifteen-piece chamber orchestra in it. Lots of Mozart. So what is the big secret?" he continued as they climbed the stairs. "Other than the pleasure of your company, what is the purpose of my visit, which I notice you were careful not to discuss during dinner?"

"I've been hearing things in Room 14," she said. "Strains of music. We're going to switch rooms tonight. If you hear it too, I'll know I'm not losing it — and knowing the repertoire the way you do, maybe you can identify it."

George stood in the center of the room while Keighley packed. "I don't hear anything."

"It tends to start later on, after midnight. You could get some sleep first if you like."

"Hmph," George said. "Probably a radio station in San Francisco. Maybe even Los Angeles."

"Maybe," Keighley said noncommittally. "These redwood walls are awfully live." And she left him to unpack.

Room 15 was quiet enough to make her nervous; she opened the window wide enough to let in the rustling and creaking of the trees, and went to bed.

She dreamed of ghosts dancing, musical ghosts, playing bone flutes, climbing moonbeams like ladders. But it all seemed strangely remote, neither frightening nor funny, and when presently the ghosts climbed into the sky and vanished, it was as though they had gone away long ago.

She woke as the sun was rising. There was no sound from George's room, and she didn't venture to disturb him. One of her back-burner plots was ready to boil over anyway. She went down to breakfast.

Jerry Kerrigan had come back, and there was trout for breakfast for those who wanted it.

"I won't say no," Keighley said, forking golden fillets onto her plate. "I'm off home today, where trout comes from Costco at five bucks a pound. It snows here in the winter, doesn't it?"

"You bet," Jerry said.

"Is it safe to drive up here in the winter? Are the roads passable?"

"Usually. This is a State highway, they run the snowplow over it pretty often. If you want to come here in the winter, better bring chains or the Highway Patrol might not let you up here without 'em."

"Hmmm. What I was thinking of was a special Christmas package here. Because of the snow, which down in the lowlands we don't see from one decade to the next. And Karen could roast geese and things. You could probably fill the house just on the strength of her cooking. But you'd want to import games and carolers and things. Maybe it would be the better part of valor to bring all the guests up on a bus. Hey, I know, a murder weekend! or a haunted house."

"Where's something to write with?" Karen muttered. "Where's something to write *on*?" She pulled a pencil from her apron pocket and an envelope from a shelf and started taking notes.

"So are there any ghosts in the hotel, Jerry?" Keighley asked, deceptively casual.

"Not that I ever saw."

"I asked, because I've been hearing things in Room 14."

Jerry put his coffee mug down on the table, hard enough to send drops flying.

"Oh, not clanking chains," Keighley went on. "It's music. Classical music."

"Mother of God," the old man muttered. He had gone pale under his tan. Karen cleared her throat.

"Kids, have you finished your breakfast? Then you can go and play." They watched silently while the children filed out.

"His name was Bert Butler," Jerry said. "Lord, it was a long time ago. 1933, the very bottom of the depression. The previous depression," he corrected himself.

"Bert and I both went to work here in the lodge after high school. I didn't mind, because the place was going to be mine someday, and besides it meant I could get some fishing in. But it chafed Bert. He wanted to get away and go to college, study music. But there just wasn't any money.

"He rigged up a radio up in the attic, ramshackle thing, one of our buddies built it. Wouldn't bring in anything but at night. He used to hang over that radio set for hours, listening to all the jazz and news and everything, waiting for them to play what he called real music. And sometimes they did. Don't know if that made it better or worse.

"Anyhow, one day he brought a hamper full of clean sheets up to Room 13 — that's the housekeeper's closet, we put a number on it so's nobody'd get funny ideas about 14 — and then he took something out of the bottom of the hamper and went into Room 14. Maybe it was because of that view to the southwest, 'way down the canyon. And that's where he shot himself."

"Oh, no," Karen said. Keighley put her hand to her temple.

"Where did he get the gun?" George asked. No one had heard him come in, but there he stood, leaning against the door frame like a man in the last stages of exhaustion.

"German officer's pistol, somebody's souvenir from the World War. The First World War," he corrected himself again. "If it belonged to anybody, they never claimed it."

"Damnation," George said. "What a

wasted life, wasted talent. And he's still there."

"No, sir," Jerry said.

"Old man, I have spent the past six hours —"

"Are you a Catholic, by any chance, sir?"

"Good God, no."

"Then you wouldn't understand. But he didn't die there. He lived another three days. Father Petrini went up to the hospital and heard his confession and gave him his Last Rites. So he's at peace, and he can't be haunting Room 14."

"Something is," George said stubbornly. "May I have some coffee, please? Lots of coffee. I have to get back up there and transcribe —"

"A bullet in the brain," Keighley mused. "It hit him where Shostakovitch's did, only rather harder, and the psychic shock made an impression on whatever it is that records that kind of thing. Or maybe it just soaked into that live redwood paneling.

"In which case it might repeat itself from time to time, so listen, George. If you hear a sort of Baroque gigue for diverse instruments —" she whistled a phrase — "for Heaven's sake get it down. You get some breakfast; I'm going up to pack."

"Well, I shall be here for several more days," George said. "I want to catch the third and fourth movements. Symphony for Grand Orchestra on Themes by Butler. What was his first name? Albert? Herbert? It begins like this..." Keighley heard his booming baritone all the way up the stairs.

Once she had cleared out Room 15, and made a note to talk to George later about composers' workshops, she went into 14 to see if she had forgotten anything. The bed had been slept in, for a few hours at least, and the covers thrown violently to the floor. George's portable keyboard sat on a chair beside the table. All over the table, all over the floor, were sheets of paper, mostly the wide-lined stuff George used for rough notes, all squiggled over with staffless neumes. Atop it all on the table lay a notebook of real music paper with a phrase on it in George's spiky hand.

It all seemed very good. Karen and Melanie would have to refrain from cleaning the room for a few days. Keighley stood by the window, watching the sun's light creep down the side of the canyon, listening. It was the wrong time of day to hear anything — but after a while she heard (or thought she heard) the sound of a flute, a simple tune like a shepherd's pipe, falling and rising until it vanished into the sky.

❄

Dorothy J. Heydt lives in Albany, California with her husband and two children. But if you hear mysterious music floating out of her house, it won't be ghosts — just Dorothy singing obscure songs in medieval Latin.

Gail Butler is well-known in the Northwest as an artist and a fan. She is an ex-military-wife, musician, barber, and an antique restorer as well as an expert at drawing figures and animals. In her spare time she is a volunteer Jewish mother to Northwest art fandom.

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Buttermilk Pancakes

by Peter A. Greene

Some poltergeists thump. Some move furniture. Some howl and break vases and wake you up in the middle of the night. Mine does not. Mine...well, mine cooks.

I rented the house because it looks quaint. A middle-aged bachelor can afford to live in quaint surroundings. It makes him seem less menacing to the population of a small town like Henford. An aging spinster organist of the Congregational Church can look up at the darling Victorian shutters and the cute little scalloped shingles rising up above the pink clapboard to determined peaks and find it impossible to imagine me inside drooling in lecherous abandon as I charm the panties off some Dairy Queen debutante. The slow-moving ayupping selectman can come inside and respectfully eye the hefty oak furniture and feel secure that there are no other queens to worry about.

I had come back to New Hampshire on the basis of the vague sense that of all the places I had lived, New Hampshire brought the least sneer to that perennial conversation clincher, "Writer? Well, of course, but what do you *do?*" I remembered the pine forests of my youth fondly. And I remembered the welcome tendency to leave one's neighbor alone, a quality that Henford had in excess, which is no doubt why none of the twenty-odd people who could have warned me about my quaint cottage chose to.

"Oh, yea-ah. Lotsa folks have enjoyed that view," said Mrs. Enright at the church dinner.

"Oh, and will you be doin' much indoor work?" said Mr. Philbrick. These and other usefully indirect commentary came back to, you will excuse the expression, haunt me later.

I suppose I noticed nothing at first because I cooked at home so rarely. As with all small communities, Henford suspended conventions of privacy for the ritual Checking Out the New Bachelor. Food, invitations, church socials all gravitated toward me as if I were a one-man starving nation, and not one occasion on which food did not appear in the general vicinity of an eligible female. I bought a roll of masking tape at the hardware store just to tag all the casserole dishes.

When I did take to cooking, I confess that a romantic conceit led me to observe that spaghetti surely did taste better far away from the city. I have always had a strong domestic streak, a linen thumb my mother used to call it, and a good touch in the kitchen. But in this kitchen I was *le chef extraordinaire*. I kept postponing the setting up of the official dining room and ate instead at the round oak table in the kitchen corner, where I would bless the room and drink in the heady aroma as I ate.

It was a ritual which I enjoyed enormously and more and more frequently as the casserole collection began to decelerate. I had sampled most of the Yankee delights that Henford had to offer and found none for which I felt like deserting my own humble kitchen. But then I had not yet encountered my goddess of the Granite State.

Peggy Philbrick breezed through my front door in a wash of crisp cotton, lilac, and fried chicken. "I'm here to check you out," she said, and I wish my doctor could sound that businesslike when he says it. She plunked down at the kitchen table on which she deposited a big red and white bag of chicken from my old friend the Colonel. Had she been ugly and unpleasant, the chicken alone would have endeared her to me, but she sat there in a white oxford shirt, hair pulled back, smelling purple and sweet, and then. Well, and then she smiled. "It's quick, easy, and with nothing to clean up or keep track of," and she pointedly eyed the casserole wing of the kitchen. "Besides, a big city boy like you has probably had all the home cookin' your system can take."

So we sat together and dismembered some poor former poultry, and I talked for a bit. She rested her elbows on the table, her hands holding the chicken, her wrists bent just so. Then she talked, and I could not take my eyes from her mouth. She was an ambulance driver. Her personal car was a Valiant, an old one with the pushbutton transmission, with over two hundred thousand miles on it. Her father, a local contractor, had left it to her when he died, and she saw no reason to think she couldn't keep it forever. "He always called me Mahgaret," she said. "He was the only one." She wiped a tear unashamedly away from one eye. "I loved my fahthah."

I believe I stared a great deal. Had it occurred to me to offer her coffee or some sort of dessert I probably would have gotten an inkling of what was to come, but I had nowhere near that presence of mind. Before I knew it, she was headed to the door.

She extended a hand and I took it. It was delightfully warm, imperially slim.

"You will, uh, will you," and there was some more, in a similar vein ending up somewhere along the lines of, "Stop by again?"

She looked back at me, pleasantly eyeing me like a tall, but attractive, side of beef. "And you write for a living." She smiled again and drove away in the blue pushbutton Valiant. I sat on the porch and decided that I had now seen everything there was to see in the Granite State.

Little did I know that the next day held one more surprise. It had been an exceptionally long day. I had cleared three trees and ended up in mortal combat with the last. When blood and sap had subsided down to evening, I realized that I had precious little time to complete the day's errands. I kicked my little yellow Opel into what passed for high gear, racing in and out of Page's Hardware and the local A&P like a madman, mentally bemoaning the loss of local boy points such speedy behavior would cause.

Bottom line. I got home late, and tired, clutching the true sign of the gastronomically desperate, a McDonald's bag. I set the bag on the table, the sweaty clothes in the hamper, and my body in the shower. Then I decided to stretch out on the couch for just a second.

Two hours later, when I awoke, something smelled different. I walked into the kitchen. The McDonald's bag was in the garbage. A perfectly seasoned chowder was simmering on the stove. The front door was still locked. I was the only visible presence in the bungalow, and believe me, I searched that baby, motivated, I must admit, more by a fleeting hope that the dinner gift would be accompanied by some feminine surprise. But I was clearly the only human presence in the house. I sat and ate the chowder. It was wonderful. When I said so aloud, the pot on the range let go a flurry of light bubbling. I began to consider the possibility that New Hampshire had not upgraded my cooking skills after all.

Was it possible, I inquired of some local old-timers, that I shared my little bungalow with some sort of local hant?

"You mean a poltergeist?" said Olly Green. "Wall, ye-ah, there has been talk of some strange things in that house." He and the other good old boys sat on the park bench and looked at each other with what folks in Pittsburgh would've called stony, impassive silence. In New Hampshire it would be described as open amusement.

I don't think that they were particularly taken aback by my belief in a spirit, but they were curious to see how far I was willing to pursue the matter in a public place. I obliged them. "Any murders, or anything like that happen there?" I asked.

"Can't say as there were," said Francis Fontaine. "Can't say as there weren't."

"Course, there was Bridey Mickle," piped up Oren White.

"Yes?" Oh, I was a fine straight man that afternoon. Even got out a notepad.

"Yep," said Olly. "Near poisoned her husband. Found him floppin' around in the kitchen like a prize perch, hawkin' and spittin', pukin' out salt cod and liver like a god damn fountain. Volunteer firemen suited up in the slickers before they'd carry him off to the hospital. Came home two days later and took an ax to the stove, made Bridey walk to the inn every day and fetch him lunch."

"T'weren't exactly a murder," said Francis.

"Hell of a way to treat a perfectly good stove," said Oren. And so on. After a week of careful legwork I knew that a) everyone knew something about my house that I didn't; b) I was never going to develop a New England sense of humor.

So I moved on to empirical research.

I bought enough groceries to feed Montana for a month and started experimenting. "Okay," I said to the kitchen. "I know you're here, and you know I know, so let's see what we can do."

Like a kid hunting his way through a new video game, I trial-and-errored my way to some basic rules.

1) It preferred that I do the elementary stuff. Boiling water, melting butter, two ingredient pieces — these went faster or at all only when I handled them.

2) It didn't like red meat. Hamburger and steak burned quickly if I didn't watch; it would discourage these but not thwart them.

3) Real butter or good margarine. No spreds. With very carefully controlled bursts of heat it would turn those spred sticks into little missiles.

4) No buttermilk. Buttermilk pancake batter, one of my longtime specialties, turned black roughly, oh, half a second after hitting the pan.

5) It liked talking, wasn't wild about singing. When I got punchy and started doing silly voices and soap opera narration I swear the boiling pots sounded like a sweet young girl's giggle.

I probably could have let things stand at that and treated the other resident of my kitchen as an unusual but beloved invisible appliance, had not the Right Reverend Windsor Farragut called, or had I not taken the call in the kitchen. Why, he wondered with appropriate brevity, had I not appeared at the Congregational Church yet? He was too polite to question directly if I had, perhaps, Catholic tendencies, but I realized a) I needed to score some clerical points here, and b) this would be a great test run for my new, well, appliance.

So I invited the reverend over for lunch. He came, he saw, he ate, and we conquered. A lightly seasoned spinach salad. A seafood chowder with a perfect mixture of mystery creatures. "This," he said around a spoon, "is wonderful." Somewhere around the main course he simply stopped talking. I put the rest of the chowder into Mrs. Miller's tupperware and gave it to him.

"Ah," he said wistfully on his way out, "Mrs. Farragut has never learned to cook quite this well." Which, from his expression, I took to mean the Right Mrs. Reverend couldn't warm dogfood in a microwave. "Do you suppose you could...?"

I adopted a humble gaze. "I'm afraid that it is a gift, an...inspiration that I don't fully understand myself." Which was certainly not a lie!

I danced cheerfully and praised the kitchen in my best silly voice. Surely this would mark a new step forward in my acceptance in my new home town.

Well, surely it did. Next came the head of the library board. The board had finally caught wind that there was an Author in town and had sent her to do her best Glinda imitation and determine if I was a good witch or a bad witch. We had them all over for supper. By the second round of stuffed pork chops I had my own shelf in the fiction stacks.

The Girl Scouts asked to meet in my kitchen. The mayor made three trips to discuss a committee position that we both knew I would accept when hell froze over twice. Mrs. Pickerel, the local grand dame of poetry, stopped by to get my "professional opinion". My publisher, who had previously praised me for being a "low-maintenance" writer, decided that a bi-weekly personal visit (right around supper time) was appropriate and necessary.

In between culinary triumphs, I pursued Peggy. Okay, well, actually, I followed her around. We went to a drive-in movie in the ambulance. I bought her cheese dogs. She explained to me why roast beef and pizza should be sold in the same restaurant. We walked on a beach. Somewhere in there I kissed her; somewhere else in there she kissed me. She seemed to find the whole thing rather amusing, like someone watching the agonizing suspense of a movie audience when she already knows how the picture turns out. I felt like I would explode with such force that my brain would be blown into space to land thumpthumpthump amidst the canals of Mars. Okay, I may be hyperbolizing here, but I felt pretty damn good.

I wanted to cut through her air of mild amusement. I wanted to impress the hell out of her. I had balked at turning the kitchen on her; it seemed a sinful abuse of power. But I really, really wanted to impress her. I wanted her to bite into an omelet and lift her eyes in an expression of adulterated love and admiration. So we made a date to eat at my house.

I bought the best ingredients. I started cooking at about two minutes past noon. When she appeared at the door, I conducted Peggy directly to her seat and delivered the appetizer, then returned gleefully to the preparation of the main course. I was flushed with the anticipation of triumph. The poltergeist, my partner, my supernatural supernumerary, had charmed the minister, conquered the library board, and pacified a New York publisher. As I pulled the bread from the oven, I had no doubt that it would help me melt the granite goddess.

Then from the next room, finally christened this evening as a dining room, I heard her speak.

"Oh my God! This is awful."

Stomach wrapped around my heart, I walked in. I tasted the soup. I considered myself fortunate that she had not actually vomited onto the table. A mistake. A misjudged taste, a warp in the cosmic woof. Please.

But it wasn't. The salad was putrid. The beef was rancid. The bread, well. In the bread, it had embedded a dead rat.

My granite goddess sat on the couch, watching me. I came and knelt before her, whiter, I am sure, than the mountains. "Oh," I said. "Oh oh oh." I said that a lot.

She took one of my hands. "Perhaps you had better tell me." So I did.

And she believed me, in fact told me that the town was amazed that I had not yet run screaming back over the mountains. My hypersonic acceptance into Henford society was not due to my culinary prowess, but the fact that I was supernaturally certified, a poltergeist-taming scribe.

"Okay," I said. "But why this? Why did it do this?"

"I never met a writer before," she said. "Are you all this dumb?" I made an obligingly dense face at her. "You don't get it, do you?"

"That much is certain," I replied.

She walked over to the kitchen door. Three sticks of butter came arcing just past her shoulder. "Why is it doing this?" I said.

"Not it," she said, turning back to me. "She."

Peggy gave me a quick peck on the cheek. I heard my entire stock of plates smash onto the kitchen floor. "I think I had better go."

— ◦ —

Well. Just when you think you've rolled with about as many curves as a person can expect to handle. Later that evening I sat thoughtfully in the kitchen, where the dish fragments were

all safely in the wastebasket and the leftovers were miraculously delicious. Then I sat in the front room, laid my face on the couch, drank in the last lingering taste of lilac, Peggy's smell.

Then, very quietly, and out of sight of the kitchen, I began to pack.

— ◦ —

I called the next morning, from the library, to secure a new house. All I said was that I'd like to look at a new place. Mrs. White said, "I had one picked out for you, just in case. It's a bit more than what you're in now, but I think Peggy is certainly worth it."

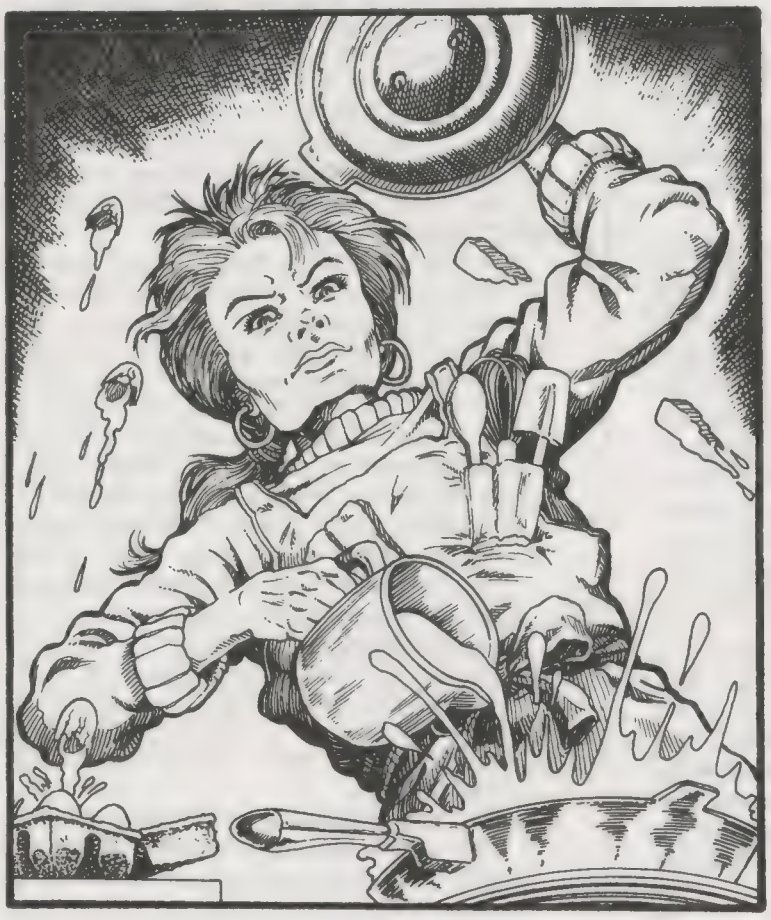
Apparently that was the consensus, for in two days I accumulated a large, all-volunteer crew. Peggy had a long run over to Nashua, but she stopped by and kissed me with a look so close to the omelet expression that I would have moved all my belongings with my teeth if necessary. On moving day we were all careful to stay clear of the kitchen, but there was nary a whimper, not so much as a spatter of grease. Mrs. Pickerel was particularly put out; she had come to record the epic adventure of the day a big city writer boy left a ghost behind to win the hand of a local ambulance driver. It was no Flying Dutchman, but it was certainly the best Henford had seen for a while, and now it was going to lack a dramatic climax. While I appreciated her frustration, I was just as glad to get off easy.

By the end of the day I was as tired from knotting up my whole body apprehensively as from the work. I would sleep long and hard, give myself the next day off, and be ready to welcome my granite goddess back to town with open arms.

I awoke refreshed; I sang in the shower. Then, towel around my waist, I padded to the kitchen, and at the door, the smell that my brain had tried to deny reached right down my nose and grabbed my gut.

Sitting on the counter was a perfect stack of pancakes.

I had not gotten rid of my female spirit, my jealous female spirit, determined to separate me from my granite goddess. I slumped against the doorframe and slid to the floor, more than a bit numb. After some indeterminate period of time, I became aware that the plate of pancakes was pushing itself up against my bare foot. I began to eat them, one at a time, plain. About noon the Green boys, who were supposed to help me move the heavy bookshelves, came to the door, took one look at me and the plate of pancakes, said, "Uh-oh," and left. I thought of calling Peggy's answering machine but decided that at that moment there was probably not an available phone line within miles.



Soon the afternoon was evening. The first time Peggy came through the door it was with an armful of groceries. "I heard," she said to me. "Yes, I heard," she called loudly to the kitchen.

"How is it," I asked, "that no one around here ever tells anyone anything, but everyone still knows about everything?"

She didn't answer but called, "I had to walk. I'll be right back."

The second time she came through the door with an armful of cookbooks. Her hair was pulled back; her sleeves were rolled up. "We are going to have it out, tonight." I swear every plate in the cupboards shook and rattled.

Although, or perhaps because, I did little that night but sit aside like the prize at a medieval joust, it was one of the longest nights of my life.

At 6:00, she began a simple sauce. I stood in the doorway and watched. By 6:15 she had added about two pounds of flour and corn starch, but the sauce was still thinner than soup. Shortly thereafter it suddenly turned into a white brick.

At 7:00, Peggy began an omelet, one hand on the pan and one on the range control, wrestling to keep the heat within acceptable range. At 7:30, she set a black-edged slab of egg on the counter. I sampled the inner section which was least crispy. "This is not bad," I said. Immediately three gallon jugs of milk blew up.

"I think you had better wait in another room," said Peggy.

At 8:00, Peggy began a simple spaghetti sauce. It promptly overboiled and sprayed red splatter about the kitchen and on her.

At 8:30, every egg blew up, one at a time, like a string of firecrackers. Some of the shell pieces flew past me and embedded themselves in the wall.

At 9:00, Peggy turned on the classical station full blast on the kitchen stereo. At 9:05, two sticks of butter shot into the speakers. At 9:20, Peggy began singing through the complete works of Verdi, which she continued until becoming hoarse several hours later.

At 10:30, Peggy laid out every cookbook known to man: Fannie Farmer, McCall's, Better Homes and Gardens, and three Betty Crockers. She poured egg mix into a pan, set the lid on it, and set a cement block on the lid. At 11:00, Betty Crocker burst into flames. At 11:30, the plates began to fly. I heard several sizes of containers explode, followed by the roar of some large fire. Peggy gasped, rallied, hollered, "I'm

Artwork by Barb Armata

not leaving," and apparently shot off one of the fire extinguishers. At that point I got up to intervene, but Peggy and a deeper echo of her own voice yelled, "No. Stay out of it!" So out I stayed.

It got quieter in the kitchen, hotter in the house. Sometime shortly after midnight, I fell asleep.

At 6:30, Peggy woke me to serve me a nearly perfect stack of pancakes. I took a bite and looked up in surprise. "These're buttermilk," I said. "She won't cook with buttermilk."

Peggy pushed a lock of hair back with the inside of her wrist. "She will now," she said.

— ∘ —

So we live in Henford still, the local oddities, which in New England is a few ranks below beloved eccentrics. My spirit is tamed and seemingly happy, and my granite goddess is...well, I'm pretty tame and happy myself.

Not that I think we've resolved everything. Yesterday I noticed that the Valiant was running low on oil. This morning it wasn't, and Peggy was on a run all last night to Keene. I remember that she had to walk to my house the night of the big battle, and that she wouldn't let me drive the Valiant for the first few months we were married. I am wondering if Peggy's expertise with a spirit is testament to talent or experience. I am wondering if it's terribly sexist to suppose that an automotive spirit would be male.

Today, Peggy announced that we're pregnant. "We" is precisely the word she said, plus that she and I had something to talk about. I am sitting in the kitchen, wondering if poltergeists make little polterbabies. I am thinking it is time to call Mrs. White and get looking again, for a larger house with a big garage and a big kitchen.

❄

Peter A. Greene started out life in New Hampshire but now teaches English in western Pennsylvania. Outside of school, he hosts a Saturday morning Big Band radio show, directs a church bell choir, and plays trombone in the town band. He lives in Hannabille with his wife Janet and their two children.

Barb Armata is active in several areas of art, doing commercial signs and ads, comics, illustration, and paintings. Her depictions of "the odd, the alien, and the everyday" can be seen at Northeast sf art shows such as Boskone.

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Artwork by Armand Cabrera

LEGACY

I could never remember anything about my mother, not even the color of her eyes or the sound of her voice, and yet I know that I was four years old when she disappeared.

"Go on, Dreya," my father would say when I asked him about her, "don't waste your time talking about her. She's gone, and will never

by

Nora M. Mulligan

return." And there was something in his voice, something harsh as if he had been calling all day across heavy seas to someone who wouldn't answer. I learned when he had that sound to his voice that he would talk to me no more.

And all my older brother, Gareth, said when I would ask him was, "How can you not remember your own mother, when you were that old when she was gone?"

"Did she die?" I would ask him, as I would never ask my father. "Did she just leave us? What does Father mean when he says she disappeared?"

And Gareth would sound older than his years, and far older than I, and he would turn away from me, just as our father did. "She's gone, and that's all."

I remember that when I was seven or eight, and I wanted to go with my father in his boat, he turned on me with eyes like storms, and shouted at me as I had never heard him shout before. "Never! Never while I am outside of my grave will you ever set foot in a boat of mine, or of any man's!"

I remember I was so surprised I couldn't even be afraid, and I asked him, "But why not? You take Gareth with you, and you took him when he was younger than I am now."

"That's different," he said, in a quieter voice, but still with the anger in it like the sea. "He's my son, and he's a boy, and you're my daughter." He said something very quiet then, and I was not sure that I'd heard him correctly. I thought he added, "My only daughter," but I could not be sure, then or later.

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I was angry and perhaps I stormed about it myself. I couldn't be angry at him long when under all the fury and the harsh words I could feel the sadness in him, and the loneliness, though I was too young then to name it for him.

He would not let me go swimming in the sea with the other children, either. He said it was because he was afraid I could hurt myself. I knew at the time that it wasn't the whole truth, for I was at least as strong as Brigid or Ella who were allowed to swim out to the ropes, and I was stronger than some.

It was then I asked Gareth, "Was it our mother was hurt in the sea, that Father is so afraid for me?"

"I don't know why he's so afraid for you," said Gareth, his face shuttered like the houses that are being left to the winds and the sea. He did know something, but he would never tell me.

And for the longest time when I was a child, my father would come home later than all the other men in the village. His would be the last boat to reach the shore, long after the other men had returned and were in their homes, eating with their families. I knew he was sad, and angry sometimes, and I thought maybe he would not return at all, that he would give himself to the sea and the sea would take him as sometimes it took other men from the village. I'd be waiting up for him some

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"Couldn't I call to her, or send for her somewhere, and maybe she would hear me?"

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nights, so tired I could scarcely see straight, but I thought if I weren't there at the window, maybe this would be the time he wouldn't come home. On those late nights, when he would come home, if I was still awake, he would take me and put me to bed silently, without a word of comfort, without any word at all. He looked different from the other men coming home from the sea: more tired, more beaten by the weather, and sadder, sadder as if he'd caught the most precious thing in the ocean, and lost it again. No matter what I asked or how I begged him, he would tell me nothing about his trips, or what it was he was looking for, and couldn't find.

The only other time I can remember my father screaming at me was one day when I was perhaps ten or so. There was a little gray trunk that he kept under his bed, wedged in behind all his fishing gear and the clothes he had worn out and needed to repair. I don't remember why I was being so thorough in my cleaning on that day, but I took everything out from under the bed, and I saw the box. It looked strange to me, and mysterious, and I was looking for the key that would open it. I brought it to my father, to ask him about it, and his face turned the dark red when he saw it in my hands. He tore it away from me as if it held the terrors of the other world, and all the time screaming at me for touching his things. He told me to never come into his room again if that was the way I would behave in it, and he scared me so much I never did come back into his room for more than a few seconds at a time after that.

It was only when I became older that I realized how lonely my father was, and how isolated. And I thought that maybe he should be looking for another wife, to keep him company when Gareth and I should grow up and leave. My father was a handsome man, and a good fisherman, and no one ever had a word against him for the way he raised my brother and me, and yet there was never a hint that any of the women in the village had any designs on him for a husband. I knew even when I was young and romantic that it wouldn't be my father reaching out and taking the first step. Whatever had happened with my mother had frozen something in him, and if he had ever been able to smile and laugh with a woman, he never did after my mother was gone. But it was strange the way the women in the village would not laugh and smile and make the effort with him. Sometimes I thought maybe they were afraid, a little, of the ice in him, and the loneliness. Or maybe they were afraid of what had happened to my mother, and that he was tainted with it, whatever it was.

You would think, in a small village like ours, that it would have been easy for me to find out about my mother from our neighbors. It was true that none lived especially near to us, but there were the men who fished with my father, and the women whose children played with Gareth and me, and saw us in church every Sunday. I thought, certainly one of them would be able to tell me about my mother, what she was like and what had happened to her. Certainly at least one of them would have a loose tongue sooner or later and let slip something by accident that I would manage to hear. And you can believe that I asked, in sly ways as well as outright. But no one ever gave me a straight answer. Over the years, I learned that my mother's name was Mary, that she had been from somewhere far away, never seen before she appeared at my father's house, that she simply disappeared one day and was never seen again, and no one knew what happened to her. One old man told me my mother was beautiful. One old woman told me that I re-

Artwork by Armand Cabrera

sembled her. But that was all, and it was not enough for the hunger in me.

And when Seamus asked me to marry him, I accepted him, despite the hole in the heart of me. He was a good man, Seamus, a good provider from a good family, and I think he cared for me, and I for him. But I couldn't actually marry him and say the words and mean them, not as long as there was the question about my mother that was never answered.

It was my father who asked me, "Why won't you name the day? He's a good man, and loves you surely. Why do you stand in the way of your own happiness?"

"And how can I be marrying any man, when I have no mother to prepare me for the wedding, to tell me what a girl needs to know?" I asked him back.

"Your mother," he said, and turned away as if I had struck him.

I took him by the shoulder and turned him back to me. "My mother! My mother that I never knew and I can't remember! Why won't you tell me about her, now, now when I am to be a bride myself and perhaps a mother after? Can't you see why I need to know?"

I had never seen him look so old, so wounded and worn as he did then. "Dreya," he said, "there's nothing your mother could have told you about being a wife and a mother that could possibly help you."

"Is she even alive? Can't you tell me that much?"

"I don't know," he said. It was more than he had said all my life. "She is gone, surely, and will not return."

"Are you sure? Couldn't I call to her, or send for her somewhere, and maybe she would hear me?" It was the question I had been asking inside all my life, but had never dared ask him before.

"I wouldn't know where you could call," he said, and left me alone with my thoughts.

Then one night, I was walking along the beach. I found myself saying the words that were in my heart, to the moon, or to the sea, or to her. "She is somewhere," I said, "somewhere touched by your light or lapped by your waters. I never believed her dead, and I don't now. Tell her, then. Tell her that her daughter is grown, and soon to be married, and that I need her!" I started crying then, as if I were just four years old again, and without a mother or any comfort in the world.

I waited by the shore for a long time. I don't know what I expected, but I waited, and I hoped, and I was even disappointed when I went home cold to bed, though there was no reason I should have been.

I was embarrassed by the memory of how I had called to the sea, and had cried by the waves all alone, and it was

some days before I went near the sea again. I had almost decided to name the day, and marry Seamus and put aside all the questions, once and for all. There were answers, and my father knew them, but I was sure he would never tell me what they were.

It was in that mind that I went walking alone again by the shore, close to the place where I had called to the sea for my mother, some days later. And when I saw the box by the rocks where the tide had washed, I thought little of it except that it was an interesting looking thing, and odd to find here. And there was, attached to the top of the box, a flower such as never grew in our village or anywhere within a day's journey of our village. Beautiful it was, and sweet, and when I inhaled, it was the scent of the sea.

Now I was very curious about it, and looked at the box more closely, and saw that there was writing on it. It was pale writing, as if it had been written long ago and washed almost clear by the tide, but the more I looked at it, the easier it was to read. And the words were these: "My dear child, my Dreya, this is for you for your wedding." There was something written after that, but I couldn't make it out. Perhaps it said "Mother" and perhaps it said "Mary," but it looked like neither of those things, and indeed it looked like no letters I had ever seen in this world.

There was no lock on the box. It opened at my touch, though somehow it had sealed all the water out, for the inside was dry as bleached bones. At first what I saw was the veil, a beautiful thing of white, like spiders' webs more than like any lace I knew, fine and pale and silky. I drew it out of the box with trembling fingers, awed by it. And then I saw the crown at the top of the veil. It was silver, not gold, and light in weight, and iridescent like the sun on the ocean on a clear day. I held the crown in my hand, and then it was that I remembered my mother. I could see her as clearly as if she were standing before me now.

She was a tall woman, with fair hair like silver itself, and in my memory she was out working in the garden when Gareth and I came running to her. She turned to look at us, the smile on her face even before she could see what brought us out to her. "And what is it you have?" she asked in my memory. How could I have lost her voice, the sound so warm and soothing like honey? How could I have forgotten the comfort of her, the way she lit up when she saw us as if we were treasures for her? I remembered it now, my eyes closed and the crown and veil in my hand.

I heard myself, too, my voice as the child I was. "Look at the pretty thing we found in the box in the wall!" I cried, and in my hands was a crown, like the one I held now. "We were thinking we'd use it in our play, and be kings and queens -" And then I stopped, for I saw the look on her face, and the smile that disappeared.

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I held the crown in my hand, and then it was that I remembered my mother.

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She reached for the crown with a trembling hand, and her eyes (they were green, darker than mine, but like them) grew wide and strange as she saw it.

"What's the matter, Mother?" asked Gareth, frightened, as we both were at the change in her.

She said nothing then, but reached for the crown, and took it from my hands. I let it go as if it burned me. She didn't even seem to see us anymore. She drew a deep breath and took the crown and put it on her head.

She turned away from us, without a word, without a sign that she knew us or loved us. She walked like a sleepwalker, or like one who had just awakened from a dream. Her steps were slow at first, and then they became longer and faster, towards the sea.

Gareth and I ran after her, calling to her, but she did not pause at the sound of our voices. Our father was coming back from the sea, from his boat, and he stopped in the middle of a word when he saw her, with the crown on her head. "Mary," he whispered. We were that close that we could hear him as clearly as if he shouted to her. "Mary, I'm sorry," he whispered.

She was near to him then, and she stopped her walking and put her hand out to touch his face. He clutched at her hand as if he could pull her back, keep her from wherever she was going, but she pulled her hand away from him and her feet touched the water.

I screamed then. I remembered the scream. I was hoarse for a week after it. She heard me then, as she had not before, and she turned, the waters brushing against her legs. She looked at me, and Gareth, and our father, and there was a shine in her eyes like tears. She paused there for a minute, and I thought that maybe it would be all right, she would come back and be the same as she had always been before. But she did not come back. She tilted her head as if she could hear someone else calling her from the sea, and that was the end. She turned her back on us, and dived into the water.

I saw, and Gareth saw, and my father saw, that when she dived that time, her legs were no longer human legs, but a tail like a fish. She did not surface again.

My father cried after her like a madman, throwing himself into the water and calling her name, but it was no use. She was gone from us, and never returned.

My father had hidden her crown, and with it, her memory of who she was. I had found it, and restored her to her memory, but in the doing, I had lost my own memory of her.

And now she had given it back to me, my memory, and her crown. I turned it in my hands, thinking about it, and about the mother who had loved us when she didn't know who she was or who we were. The mother who still loved us even now. If I put on the crown, who would I be? What else would I remember? What voices would I hear?

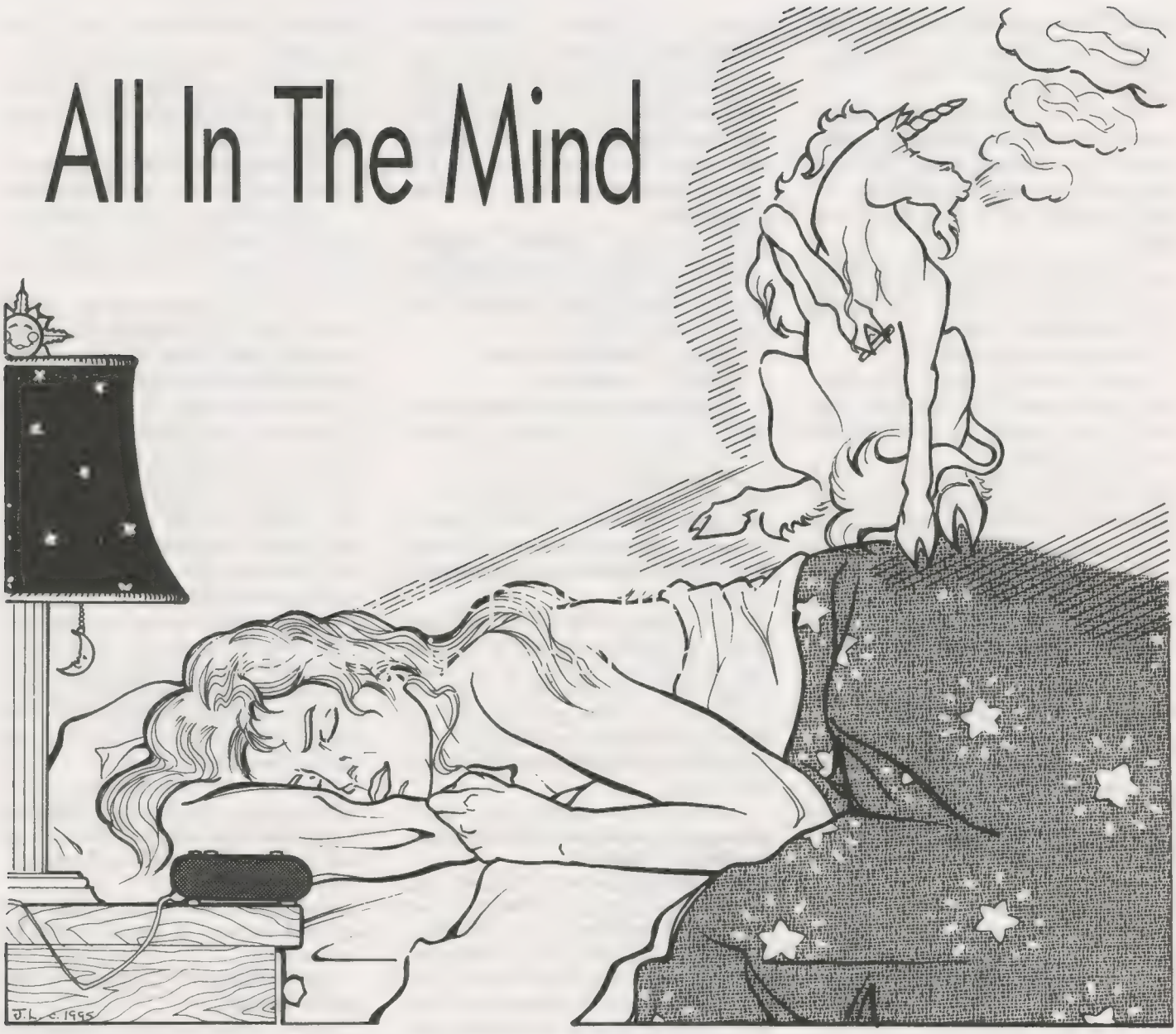
I put it back in the box and hid the box. But since then, I have heard it calling to me. And one day soon, I will place it on my head, and maybe then I will find her, in the flesh, in the water, in myself.

❄

Nora M. Mulligan has been a lawyer for ten years, a mother for five, and a writer (mostly unpublished) all her life. She was educated at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Harvard Law School. When she's not practicing law or writing, her hobbies are baking, and quilting. She lives in Peekskill, New York.

Armand Cabrera is a self-taught artist and says, "I've been at it for a million years" — really since 1980. He worked for several years in the computer game field, at Lucas Films on their *STAR WARS* games and at Electronic Arts as a computer artist.

All In The Mind



Artwork by Julia Lacquement

by Lisa Deason

I knew something was wrong when the unicorn stopped running and, oblivious to the restraints of the equine form, sat down to puff upon a cigarette.

"What the — ?" I began and he rolled a sky-blue eye in my direction.

"Sorry, it's time for my break," he said, blowing smoke rings out of his horn.

The alarm clock brought me wide awake. I stumbled out of bed, catching a glimpse of my reflection in the mirror. I looked a mess, dark brown hair tangled about my shoulders and blue eyes bloodshot.

A brisk shower and cup of coffee later, I felt more presentable. I'd always had vivid dreams but this was the first time anyone went on break in the middle of it. I tried to put it out of my mind and concentrate on getting ready for another day of accounting.

When the endless, mind-numbing day was over, I found myself once more considering the strange dream. Would I dream it again tonight or would I return to my regularly scheduled dreaming?

Now, why had I phrased it that way?

The answer wouldn't come until later when I was fast asleep.

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The microwave oven had wheels for feet and was chasing the unicorn, snapping at his hooves with its door. The unicorn squealed in fright, then leapt straight into the air, losing its horn and sprouting tremendous wings instead.

"No, that was totally wrong," the microwave objected. "Script!"

A script appeared, running on two large chicken feet to display a page for the microwave to see.

"Ha! It clearly says, 'unicorn is sucked inside microwave and cooked for precisely 1 minute and 30 seconds at 40 percent power.' Nowhere does it say anything about sprouting wings and flying away!"

The large equine circled overhead for a moment, then descended lightly, wings disappearing and horn returning. "It was a last minute change," he

said. "That was deemed too horrifying for a Class 5 dream. If you'd bother to come to staff meetings then you'd know about these things."

"Listen you, Mr. High-and-Mighty," the microwave said, smoke beginning to curl out of its front panel, "I go to all the staff meetings I know about. If I don't get the memo then it's not my fault!"

"Excuse me," I interrupted at last. "Is this some sort of frustration with authority dream? Frankly, I'm having trouble following along."

They both turned to me.

"You've been giving us fits, Beth," the unicorn said. "Do you know how hard it is to come up with original dreams anymore?"

"Especially when the dreamer's real life is boring enough to put us to sleep." The microwave made a snoring sound.

The unicorn clipped it on the side with a wicked-looking hoof. "Now, no need to get insulting! She can't help it if her life is so dull she has to make up exciting things to write in her diary."

"How did you know that?" I demanded. "Nobody knows that!"

The microwave laughed hard enough to rattle some of its innards. The unicorn looked sheepish.

"Sorry," he said. "To come up with appropriate dreams we're required to know everything there is to know about our clients."

"Clients?" I asked, wondering if I had somehow gone insane and no one had bothered to tell me.

"Sure, clients. You don't think that dreams just spring into being by some sort of galactic coincidence, do you?" The unicorn tossed his white mane. "Goodness, no. They're far too important to leave to chance! They have to be carefully scripted, have the proper sets chosen, the actors cast, then rehearsed. That's all before they're even performed live! Dreaming is a big time business."

"Then what's going on here?" I gestured around us. "Why isn't this dream going like all the others?"

"You're a special case," the unicorn said. "It was decided to let you in on this because our usual dreams weren't doing any good."

"Who decided and what good?"

"The Conglomeration of Global Dreamers and Associates, Inc." he explained. "It's the dreaming union, so to speak. We all do our parts, whether in scripting, building sets, acting or whatever to bring you, our customer, the highest quality dreams we can."

"Haven't you ever wondered why people dream?" the microwave asked. "It's not just to give us something to do, I can tell you! Every dream has a message to it. It's our job to get you people to realize something vital about yourselves."

"Oh come on," I scoffed. "You mean that I was supposed to get something out of that dream where I was being chased by two giant parakeets? *That* had a message to it?"

"You bet," the unicorn said.

"What?" I challenged.

"That's classified information, sweetheart," the microwave said. "If we told you, we'd have to kill you."

The unicorn gave it another kick. "That's enough, Danny! *Seriously*, we're not allowed to tell. The whole point to dreams is for you to figure out what they mean. You can understand them if you try."

"We've been driving your message home for so long that we're running out of different ways to say the same thing," Danny the microwave said with a snort. "So CGDA got together and gave us permission to address you directly since you seem to be ignoring us otherwise."

I looked at the unicorn, who seemed to be more trustworthy than the kitchen appliance. "That so?"

He inclined his head. "Indeed it is. You're wasting your life, Beth. You hate your job, yet you're not even considering finding another. You would desperately love to be an actress but you won't take a class in it or audition for a part because you're too afraid that you'll fail. You're stuck in a rut and what's alarming is that you're doing nothing to get out."

"You need a swift kick in the rump to get you going again," Danny said, kicking out with one wheeled foot.

"Figuratively, I hope," I said with a stern glare in case he decided to try it.

The unicorn bowed grandly. "Let me tardily introduce ourselves. I'm Scott and this as you've doubtlessly already figured out is Danny. If you'll come with us, you can pick up your script and costume."

"I get to play a part?" I asked in surprise.

"You bet, sweetling," Danny said. "It's time for your big debut."

"But I haven't done any acting since high school and that was ... well, a few years ago."

"Try seven." Danny took great delight in correcting. "My, how time does fly, hm? Turn around and you're practically ancient!"

I was tempted to kick him in the side like the unicorn Scott had done before.

"Stuff it, Danny," the big equine interjected before I gave in to the temptation. "Come on, Beth. Hop aboard and we'll get going."

A set of stairs appeared out of nowhere and I used them to climb onto the broad back. Scott set out at a fast pace and I momentarily hoped that the irritating microwave wouldn't be able to keep up. Unfortunately, it wheeled blithely along without any trouble.

We came to a site familiar to all shoppers, a mall. It seemed essentially normal except that the customers were beings that could only exist in dreams, from mythological creatures like Scott and appliances like Danny, to several things that totally defied description.

The shop we stopped at simply read "Margaret's" above the doorway. A vacuum cleaner approached us with an eager VROOM-VROOM, then said in a clear female voice, "And what can I do for you three today?"

The stairs once more rolled to a convenient place at my side and I climbed down from the unicorn's back. Scott was saying, "You tell us, Margaret. Here comes our script."

Another script with large chicken feet scurried forward to be examined by the vacuum.

"Ah!" Margaret exclaimed. "I have just the thing."

She whizzed away and returned with a bundle of clothing stacked on her bag. "Here you go, children. Changing rooms are to the back."

And so I found myself struggling into a little girl's dress and shoes. When I looked in the mirror I discovered that I no longer looked like myself but instead like a young girl with red pigtails tied with yellow ribbons.

A young boy and an imposing old woman were waiting when I emerged.

"Took you long enough," the old woman quipped and I recognized Danny's voice.

"Is that just an illusion?" I asked, intrigued.

"While in costume, all of our shapes are changed. When the costumes come off, our natural forms return," Scott the unicorn/little boy answered. "We'd

better get cracking on the script. It's a short one but we go on in less than half an hour."

"Half an hour?" I squeaked. "Listen, I don't think I can do this. I'll mess up!"

Surprisingly, Danny said, "Don't sweat it, Beth. Fear's all in your mind, you know. You just have to remember how much you love to act and the fear'll vanish in a snap."

He was right. After going over the script and rehearsing, I felt confident that I could play the part adequately.

The dream we were performing was a man's recurring nightmare of being sent back to grade school. I was playing the girl who used to pick mercilessly on him. Scott was his best friend, who in this context had also turned against him. Danny was his tough old teacher.

"See those?" Scott asked, indicating a row of lights above us. "When they turn red, we're on. When they go off, the dream's over. If the dreamer should deviate from his suggested text, then just improvise."

It went very smoothly. Since the dream wasn't mine I was allowed to know its meaning. The man was feeling ganged up upon as he used to when he was young. Since his best friend was acting in a way that never would have happened in real life, the man was supposed to realize that it was only his depression that was making him feel as though he had no friends.

I played the spoiled, bratty girl to the hilt. Before it seemed possible, it was over.

Once we were out of costume and back in our usual forms, the microwave, the unicorn and I returned to the grassy plains of my original dream.

"Well?" Danny asked me, his door wiggling in a sort of shrug.

"You were right. I *had* forgotten how much I love to act. That was really fun!"

"Then you'll give acting a try?" Scott inquired.

I thought about it, remembering the old fears and doubts. "I'll keep it in mind." But I smiled.

"That counts as a yes," Danny said firmly. "Go get 'em, girl. And get yourself a love life while you're at it."

Scott cleared his throat. "Good luck, Beth. Don't forget what you've learned. More than fear comes from your mind, you know. That's where courage comes from, too. And dreams."

"I'll remember." I threw my arms around the unicorn's neck. Feeling magnanimous, I gave the microwave a hug as well, then was amazed when he blushed a bright pink. "Thank you both."

"Awww," Danny said, scuffing one of his wheels in the dirt.

Something suddenly occurred to me. "Am I dreaming all of this?"

Scott's equine face managed to achieve a grin. "Of course. That is, after all, what we do. That doesn't make it any less real."

The next thing I knew, the alarm was buzzing in my ear and I was awake.

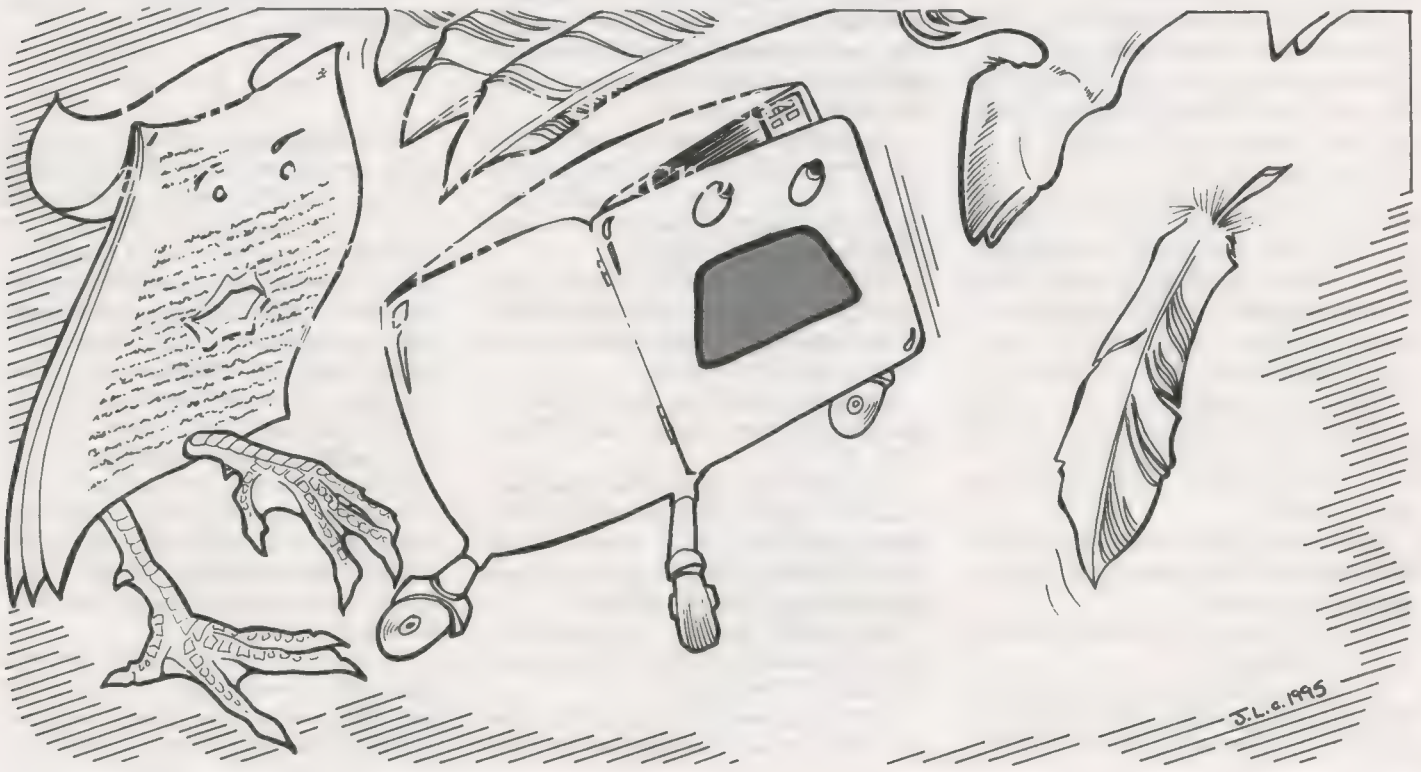
Was it only a dream? I couldn't say for sure. All I *could* say was that my life changed after that. I took some acting classes and began to pursue that career, eventually quitting my mind-numbing, number-crunching job. I never really saw Scott or Danny again but sometimes, when I'd be dreaming about giant parakeets or some such, there would be two who would wink knowingly at me just before I woke up.

When I auditioned for and won a part in my first show, I couldn't help but laugh at its title: *All in the Mind*. Somewhere, I knew there was a unicorn and a microwave who were laughing as well.

❄

LISA DEASON has had a number of short stories published in anthologies and small press publications. This is her second appearance in *FANTASY Magazine*.

JULIA LACQUEMENT works mainly in comics, specializing in painting graphic novels. She prefers illustration work, though, from hard SF to the softest fantasy — dragons and sexy robots clash daily in her studio in Seattle, WA.



Artwork by Julia Lacquement

Ambeya

by Mary Mannon Reeves

"But Commander, you don't understand. She's not just a witch, she's an ambeya ..."

"Ambeya, dumballah, hag, whatever. A witch is a witch, Captain. Same power, same greed. She'll do it."

Simyara smiled.

The door flap lifted and the foreigners entered. Simyara bent her head to the ground in obeisance, the smile tucked away for safekeeping. She studied the commander from beneath her lashes, a huge pale blur in the shadows of her hut. Was this the man who had conquered her country? Who was working his way south through the Dark Lands, like a reaper working his way through the fields?

Simyara was not impressed. There was cruelty in the narrow eyes, weird eyes the color of a summer sky. Narrow lips twisted downward, narrow mind grasped outward, but only saw what it chose to see. Still, she was ambeya ....

"What can this humble magician do for our land's Commander?" she spoke softly in her own tongue. No need to let them know she spoke theirs as well.

The captain translated, his pale eyes nervously tracking between the two. The Commander grunted.

"Magician? I don't want a damned magician. Trickery! Illusion! I want a witch, and one with power."

"The Commander wants an elephant," the captain translated. "For his entrance into the city. The one we brought from the Spice Lands has died, but the Commander has heard of elephants here as well."

Ah, an elephant. Again, she hid her smile. So the Commander had recognized the awe in the faces of his victims as he rode the great gray beast in his victory parades. He had taken his place in the pantheon, and a god's power was a very strong and complete one. Without the elephant, he was a man, and just as susceptible to a spear as the next man. But a god is a god ....

"I am not a Caller, young man. I am the ambeya."

The captain took a deep breath and shifted to face his leader again. He repeated her words.

"Bah! I told you! A witch is a witch. Give her the gold."

Simyara smiled. It was a fool who conquered a country and refused to learn of its ways. She eyed the glittering pile and nodded slowly, the smile growing wider.

The captain almost whimpered his unease. "I still don't think this is wise, sir. How can you trust a witch from a land you've just overrun? What's to keep her from summoning a monster instead? One of those horned beasts with the vile tempers, or even a dragon?"

The Commander barked a laugh and shared a conspiratorial wink with Simyara. "No such things as dragons, boy, just elephants. Besides, I do know one thing about these ambeya witches. My drum boy told me."

He grabbed Simyara's arm before she could sense his intentions, and twisted it. He held it firmly, but gently, and traced the length of her initiation scar with the tip of his finger.

"By the name of Anasi, by the gods you have chosen," he chanted crudely in her language, "you are bound to the truth, your life to mine."

Simyara gasped as the web of the geas settled across her mind, cold and unforgiving.

"A witch is a witch," he chuckled, "and an ambeya is a priestess to the spider god. But power is power, and you have the power to get me an elephant, don't you, old woman?"

She nodded slowly. "You will have your elephant, my lord," she spoke in his tongue, "by nightfall."

Tiny eyes glowed in the corner of the hut. As soon as the men had left, the spider spun down and crawled across their gold.

"You will help me?" Simyara asked.

"You will die. You are bound to him now."

She shrugged. "I'm old. Death is death, and it's coming for me soon enough."

"Death is death," the spider echoed, "and a witch is a witch."

"And a spider a spider ..."

They laughed together until the light began to fade.

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The Commander stood in the paddock, arms akimbo, heavy brows drawn into a scowl. The witch stood across from him, a smile distorting her wrinkled face. The body of the old elephant, just beyond the fence, was being removed gradually by scavengers, animal and human alike. It had been a gentle beast, unsuited for war, but by the gods, what an impression it had made when the battles were over! He had the little savages terrified!

If his blithering aide could be believed, the elephants down here were even larger, with massive ears and tusks ... the Commander closed his eyes, relishing the worship that would ride with him in the howdah.

He opened his eyes and saw the ambeya's power begin to flow down her arms and pool on the palm-strewn ground. If black could glow, this did, a

Artwork by Mark Poole

nimbus of not-light burning in the dusk, opening a hole in the paddock's center. The Commander stepped forward eagerly.

And was met by a bull elephant, twelve feet at the shoulder. Tusked. Angry.

"Did you ever wonder, Commander," the ambeya said softly, "why my people were so impressed when you rode up on Tambor's little cousin from the Spice Lands?"

The massive bull wrapped his trunk around the screaming man and lifted him high.

"Of course you didn't. After all ... an elephant is an elephant."

She said no more as the body was thrown aside. Her soul was torn away with his and sent spiraling into the fading nimbus. The elephant trumpeted and walked through the paddock fence, breaking the palisades like so much annoying brush, and vanished.

The darkness swelled around the town as the natives descended and removed what was left of the Commander's forces.

In the paddock, spiders formed their own darkness as they flowed from the palms and the bamboo to cover the witch's body in silk.

"A witch is a witch," said the one with the glowing eyes, "but this is our ambeya."

❄

Mary Mannon Reeves lives in Tullahoma, Tennessee with her husband and two sons. She's had the usual assortment of "odd-writer-jobs", but is currently the site director for a child-care program. She says, "My youngest son inspired this story with his overwhelming fascination with elephants. Better that than Power Rangers!" Although this is her second sale to the magazine, it's the first of the two that will see print. Look for another soon.

Mark Poole has a B.A. degree in fine arts from the University of SC. His early influences were Marvel Comics, sf, and fantasy novels. While living in isolation in Lexington, SC, he stumbled upon his very first sf convention. From that point on he has been very focussed and busy.

Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

Terelien paced. With a slow, almost hesitant tread, unearthly in its grace, he moved from window to window, letting the twilight fall upon his nearly human form. He'd cut his hair and allowed my tailor to outfit him, but he no more looked like he belonged in human society than a roebuck would, or a unicorn, in a herd of domestic goats.

The sky was paling. It was no longer night, but not yet day. Overhead, visible at a sharp upward angle from the south window, the moon was just at its half. At this hour, as at dawn and dusk twilights of full and new moons, the other world stands closest to our own. I have dealt enough in magic that I can sense its nearness. Terelien, born in that world, must have felt it with his every fiber. So he paced and forgot my presence, though without my help his home was unreachable.

The purpose of the costume was not so much to make him appear a man as to signal to the world that he was to be treated as one. The sheer force of social convention did more than any attempted deception to transform an apparition out of ancient legend into a mere odd-looking chap. He may have haunted a few dreams among those who saw him, but almost no one was rude enough to challenge his imitation.

Doña Emiliana, my Spanish aunt, was polite to his face when I presented him as a guest, but as soon as she was alone with me she dropped the pretense.

"What is he, Bertrand?"

"He is a gentleman from a distant part of the country. That's why he speaks so oddly. These rural ..."

"Do not treat me like a fool." She uses that assertion quite often. Though her English is very good, she worries constantly that she is missing some nuance and appearing foolish thereby. On this occasion, however, she merely meant that she knew I was lying. "You with your occult studies, your books of magic, you have finally brought in something real, eh? What is he?"

The Aluka

by Joan Howe

"An elven lord," I answered. She frowned at the word, not understanding. I groped in my weak store of Spanish for a word resembling elf. "A ... hata. Un hidalgo de los hatas." I think it should have been 'las hatas', but she didn't seem to notice the error.

"Is he as the fairies of Shakespeare? A kinsman perhaps of Oberon and Titania?"

I nodded, relieved that she understood. "You mustn't take Shakespeare's descriptions too literally. I rather think the Bard knew a little and invented the rest, but yes. That is the essential idea."

She seemed to take the information in her stride. I suppose after being married to Uncle Kolvin, nothing can unsettle her.

"So. Why is he here? Did you force him to come here and to dress in this ridiculous manner only to show your power?"

I had to laugh at that. I am as yet very small beer as a wizard. I merely had good luck with a particular spell. "It was his own choice to come here. If it had been left up to me I should be in his world now. Think of it, Aunt. The elvenlands. What could I not have learned there? Instead he persuaded me to bring him back with me when I had not been there a day. Making a way between the worlds is not so easy, it seems, as it used to be. Now that I'd made one, he wanted ..."

She had stopped listening to me and was looking past me. Terelien had come in. The door was behind me and I so attentive to the sound of my own voice that I didn't notice.

"An ye would know my aim, lady, I'll fain tell ye."

"He means ..." I began.

"I know what he means. He is no worse to listen to than you." She turned again to Terelien. "If you please."

"Know ye then that Ralantre was once a knight of elven race. None was dearer to me than him, or to him than me. Thus when the wish came into his mind to enter the world of men and live for a time a mortal's life, I spoke with him the spell called Heart's Bond, that made our hearts as one. Whatsoever befall him, I shall know it, though lands and skies and spells should sunder us. Thereafter we beseeched a great sorceress to open for us a way. She assented, and thus we came to walk in the mountains where mortals are but few. In a trifling hamlet, in a poor cottage, we found that which our kind has by custom sought for such purpose: a child newborn and yet left lone, sickly and soon to die. We laid upon it a spell of sleep. Then Ralantre altered his body's form, making small size and soft shape and earthly color, that he might resemble to mortal eye this infant. I took in my hands its swaddling clothes and in them I wrapped my companion. With me I bore away naked the mortal child, leaving behind me the immortal elf.

"A mortal life had he twenty years and one, though I had thought the one would be enough. He might, whensoever he would, have bade to die his mortal body, then summoned me to fetch home his soul, but that his chosen family bore him into church and there did pay a priest to baptize and to heal. An the priest had been of the common lot, who only mouth the words but lack the faith, no harm were done, but he was a priest true, and his words true power bore. Ralantre was made, not mortal, but in mortal likeness. From his heart the bond-spell was washed away, and from his memory the elvenlands, by the church's water. He grew then to manhood shadowed by longing for a homeland he did not remember.

"Then he in his twenty-first year did weary of his life, even though no other had he in memory. Having long forgotten that he might will at any moment his body's death, he took up a rope and became his own self's hangman. Wherefore he was denied the last rites of the church which, though it had claimed him, yet would free him not. So did he remain, bound within his mortal body, even though dead that body was. So remains he even now.

"I wist his suffering, and would have sought him, but that the way might not again be opened without his summons, the which he knew no longer how to give. A century might pass, I feared, or five, ere I found again a way to him. Fortune was kinder, though, and put in my way Bertrand, or me in his. Now I might seek for him and set him free, and in the act restore his memory."

I wondered how much of all this Doña Emiliana was following. When she spoke I knew I needn't have worried.

"What happened to the child?" she asked.

"He whom I bore away? He lives, and contentedly so. In the elvenlands is much of healing and little of death. To him we have given the name Delight, wherefore he inspires such, as is the way of mortal children."

"Will you return him when you have your friend back?"

"Wherefore should we take such action? The elvenlands are not so crowded that for each who comes another must depart." She didn't approve, I could tell. She is very big on family. Still, she knew there was nothing to be done, so after a moment she refocused her disapproval on me.

"I suppose you will be going with him on this search. What will you do, open all the graves in all the graveyards until you find this fellow?"

"He lies no longer in earth," answered Terelien, "for though his body die, yet bearing his soul it may not become as earth, but must obey him still. Out from his burial he dug him these seven months past. Even now, though he wot not the reason, the flesh is altered and becomes each day more like unto his elven shape. From his shoulders already have risen carnate wings. We

Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

need but to ride the countryside with our ears opened to every rumor. Naught of his like shall pass unnoticed."

She didn't reply for a moment while her ladylike abhorrence of rude behavior warred with a strong urge to walk around behind him and look for evidence of wings. She'd have had to look pretty sharply to see it. My tailor is very clever. But in the end she mastered herself and did not look.

"Perhaps you are right," she concluded. "It is a most reliable failing of the human race, this wagging of tongues. If what you plan is to drink in country taverns and listen to wild stories, I suppose not much worse can happen than a waste of some time and the acquisition of a taste for bad ale."

That was all she had to say about the matter in the three days between that conversation and our departure. Now the horses stood ready, the saddlebags packed. From the very corner of the window I could see the yard, where she had come to see us off ... No. She was wearing her traveling clothes. And there were far too many horses. Forgetful of Terelien as he was of me, I strode out toward the yard door. On arriving, I found the situation even worse than I'd thought: the small carriage was ready, with her saddle horse tied to it, ready to be led, and two servants, her maid and a man to serve as groom and driver, also dressed for traveling.

"Doña Emiliana, I ..."

"I don't want to hear a word of your objections. Someone must keep you out of trouble, you and your friend who is a stranger here and knows little of the customs."

"Aunt, you ..."

"Besides that, how can you properly hear gossip if you have no woman with you and not a single servant? All the news is not in the taverns, you know."

"But, Aunt, you're turning this trip into a damned caravan. We'll cause more gossip than we hear."

"And you think with him you would not in any case?" Terelien emerged from the house. He had put on his hat. In the early sunlight the eerieness of his face contrasted sharply with the everydayness of the hat. "But do not concern yourself, Bertrand. If it all proves too difficult, I can return after a few days."

Curiosity must have won out after all. She wanted long hours of travel in which to scrutinize Terelien, and she thought a few days would be enough. Doña Emiliana is a formidable horsewoman, with far more endurance than one would credit, given her age and dignity. I noticed that the two servants had been chosen for youth and strength.

"Be it your will to journey with us, lady?" the elf asked. "Good, then. A fine journey we shall have indeed."

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She did not turn back in a few days. No, indeed. Rather, long before that vague time period was ended she had taken charge of the entire trip. She monopolized Terelien with questions that only a scholar would think to ask, such as his personal recollections of the Roman occupation, which prevented me from asking him anything magically useful. Whenever we arrived at an inn she would be giving orders to the innkeeper's men before I was out of the saddle.

The only respite I had from the woman was during and after dinner, and at night. She professed to think it improper for a gentlewoman to appear in the common rooms of a public inn, and would stay in her room, sending down for a meal at the later hour customary in her homeland. Then she would bid the woman or girl who brought it to be seated, the better for Doña Emiliana to wring her brains. She always began by asking what was being said in the kitchen about Terelien (and would report the next morning "This lot think you are a Chinaman," or "It is remarkable how the Mediterranean belief in the Evil Eye had come to be known this far to the north.") Then she would ask how he compared with the other strange things they'd heard rumored. There are always rumors of strange things about, which she duly noted, but none of it was any more useful than what I was picking up downstairs in the pub.

Terelien would listen with me, his face attracting strange tales like a magnet. He drank less than I and came later to the bedroom which we always shared, though his kind do not need to sleep. Often he would bring some rural gift, a bowl of milk or a small sack of raw oats, given by some country person who recognized what he was. When all but we slept, he would open a window and strip off his clothes. His wings, folded all day under the coat, would open gloriously, as though the moon had come into the room. Even battering, howling storms would not keep him inside. I believe that he needed flight, as we need sleep.

I mentioned his nightly departures to my aunt, hoping that if she got enough of staring at him from her window she might go home. No such luck. Once she had seen him airborne, nothing could separate her from the quest. As the days of the journey became weeks, though, she did begin to tire, as did all the other mortal members of the party. After several weeks of wandering, guided only by the impulses that

seemed to come to Terelien while he did his morning and evening pacing, Doña Emiliana began to suggest a month or two at home for rest and recovery. We might indeed have turned aside, had we not had a warning to do exactly that.

It was an innkeeper's daughter who warned us, a girl of fifteen or so who came out into the yard as we prepared to leave, asking where we were going as an excuse to look at Terelien a little longer. When we said that we rode northeast through the village of Gavin's Parish, she turned pale and said that we mustn't go that way. There had been several mysterious deaths that no modern doctor or old-fashioned herbwife could explain or prevent. The people there suspected a curse, and anyone of unusual appearance was likely to be blamed for it and stoned or worse, especially anyone who was a stranger.

Terelien, who had listened with a bland expression to tales of giant hailstones and appearances of the Devil, looked at this girl with passionate interest. "Do you apprise us then, if you will, of this most obscure terror. I would know all you may tell of its nature, its origins, the speed or sloth of its action, the alterations worked upon the bodies of its victims. Speak, I bid you."

"Well, sir, there ain't much to tell. There's been seven or eight died there, last I heard, all of 'em in right good health 'til they was struck down. One lass died all in a night, but most of 'em hang on three days, mebbe four, gettin' weaker and weaker and then they're dead. They all got pale-like, lost all their color, and they all had the same two red spots on their necks, right over the jug'lar. Never more an' never less. 'At's all I knows, sir."

"Thither I shall go," he said, though she protested loudly. "The duty is laid upon me to bring, if I may, release of the dread which now lies grim upon broad field and narrow lane. For those of my kind endure not the vulnerabilities of yours. No companion do I invite, for I would lead none hence to a danger which menaces me not. Wherefore do you, my good Bertrand, Doña Emiliana, Jane and Samuel" — these last being our servants — "return you to our rooms in this fair inn, and the beasts also to the stables, and there await me."

We all objected to this plan, all at once I'm afraid. I insisted on going if he was going, and my aunt insisted on going if I were going, and Jane and Sam said that even if Doña Emiliana ordered them to stay behind they would get mounts somehow and ride after her. The inn girl continued to beg us all to stay away from the place.

He waited until we were all out of breath before he spoke again.

"Openly I go not, nor by the public road, but through meadow and wood in secret, that I meet none whose native kindness be submerged in fear or grief's rage. An this ill be as your telling implies, no harm may it offer me. Evil it were indeed should I, who might take without peril action to ease the plight of these harmless folk, turn my face and prefer inaction. Moreover, our road lies thence in any case. Do you but wait a short space of days while I clear for us the way."

"Terelien," I asked, "what is this thing that's happening in Gavin's Parish? Why are you so sure it won't harm you?"

"In ancient times men called such creatures aluka. Have you in your studies discovered such a name?"

"A Hebrew word. It means a demon or ghost that sucks the blood from the living. Called in Ireland dearg-du, in Greece vrykolakas, in the Balkans vampire."

"And in the Muslim countries alghul," Doña Emiliana added, cutting me off. "My grandfather had a book, very old, describing the beliefs of the Moorish peasants. It said that the alghul are repelled by holy things of both the Muslim and the Christian faith." She lifted from her bosom the jeweled crucifix which she had worn every day since before I was born. "This was blessed at Santiago de Compostela. Will it protect me?"

Terelien stepped close to her and raised his hand to the crucifix but did not touch it, as one holds a hand over hearth ashes to learn whether any live coals rest beneath.

"Yes," he said at length. "A most puissant artifact. In Gavin's Parish, lady, you may walk in safety, do you only keep it day and night upon your person."

"But the location of the blessing should be insignificant," I spoke up, seeing where she was leading, "as are the materials and the workmanship. A simple wooden cross should do as well." I was sure I could get one of the latter on short notice, and I was damned if I would see her accompany him while I was left behind.

"Even so, good wizard," he replied. "'Tis not from their matter that such protective talismans gain their force, but from mortal heart's faith. An the priest who blesses it or the believer who bears it be of true conviction, then though it be but two sticks bound together, within it the very power of holiness shall be manifest."

"I have other blessed things in my

Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

jewel case." Doña Emiliana turned to Jane and Sam. "Bring it out. We shall see whether any of them will be of use."

— ◦ —

Gavin's Parish was not distant. My aunt and I and the two servants arrived in the early afternoon. The innkeeper and family were astonished to see customers arrive, and had rather to scurry about to get things ready for us. Soon a crowd of the curious came 'round to have a sip of ale and a look at us. Some local fellow's half-muttered remark about "papist trinkets" gave me an opportunity to hold forth upon the subject of the aluka and useful protection from it. They all gasped to hear me recite exactly the symptoms of the local mystery plague and afterward departed virtually in a body to find the parish priest.

That night I went to sleep with the window open and two candles burning, as agreed. Before they had burned very far, I awakened to hear Terelien slipping in, half-folding his wings front and back to make a garment, as is the custom of his people when aground.

"This night have I passed upon the air the length and breadth of this good village, and no bosom has my eye lit upon that bore not a cross well blessed. Some houses had also crosses at door and even window. At others the holy thing hung as well about the necks of beasts or upon their horns. Thereby I know that your part is done and well so, dear Bertrand. Come, dress and ready you, and we shall go forth to end at last this terror."

Once dressed, I would have gone down by the stairs, boots in hand to avoid waking anyone, but he had an even quieter way. At his instructions I sat on the windowsill, legs outward, while he stood beside me and bent low.

"Do you hold to my arms as I shall hold to yours, but only leave free my shoulders, lest your weight should misdirect us." When we had firm hold of each other, he said "Do you push yourself well with your boots away from the window. Now." It took almost all the courage I had to do as he said. Just that swiftly he spread his wings above us in pavilion shape and we floated down to the courtyard like the proverbial autumn leaf.

A horse was waiting there for us, barebacked and unbridled as he always preferred. I mounted behind him and he guided the beast by gentle words and touches to a hill at the edge of the village. There on the hill's east face, in a pasture backed by a small wood, we waited. Dawns and dusks are the best times to cast the portal-opening spell, but when the moon rises just at midnight, conditions are almost as good, though the time is much briefer. I laid out my tools, cast my Circle, and just as the first white moonlight was visible I took off the blessed Saint Catherine medal I had got from my aunt. (I put it on the horse, since someone might as well have the protection.) This was the dangerous part of our plan. The aluka cares nothing for elven blood, hungering only for ours, and it is elusive. For Terelien to catch it, someone had to be bait.

Glancing west from where I stood, soothing the animal, I saw already something visible in the sky only as a darkness that hid more and more stars as it approached. I was the only unprotected mortal for miles, and it sought me as an osprey seeks a trout. Closer and closer it came, steadily as the moon rising behind it, until I felt as if that darkness must swallow stars, earth, men and beasts, sun and moon, the whole of this universe in fact, and myself only a minute atom in its vast and hideous meal. I had thought myself frightened when I left the windowsill, but now it took all my courage, all my faith, all the discipline of my art and the loyalty of my friendship with Terelien, to stand in that place and not bolt off in a panic for the false shelter of the wood.

I did not see Terelien take flight or rise up to meet the aluka. One moment it seemed the predator was alone in the sky. The next, there were two airborne creatures, one with wings silver-veined and translucent, catching the moonlight, the other with wings so dark they seemed to swallow light as black velvet does, or the pelt of a black cat. Together they fell, wrestling with each other in the air, finally striking the ground so near me I could hardly believe I had not been touched by more than the breeze of their passage. On the ground the monster still struggled to reach me as Terelien struggled to hold it back, while he called out to me, "Ere the moment pass, Bertrand, do you open the passage!" The sound of my name seemed to release my terror-shackled limbs. The moon was already half-risen. To work this quickly I must have complete concentration. I must put aside my fear for my life and for Terelien's life, put aside my horror at the aluka's approach, put aside as well the bloodstained reeking thing's distorted resemblance to Terelien, the attempt of dead mortal flesh to take the shape appropriate to an elven soul. I must be nothing else but a magician. I took up my tools and began.

No sooner was the way open than they swept past me, driving through the air as one being. When they crossed the barrier into the other world, a cloud of gray dust blew back at me, smelling of old blood, fresh blood, molds and fungi and the scentless depths of eternity. By the time my coughing fit was over, the moon was fully risen and the portal had collapsed, leaving me bleary and quivering in a Circle whose edges, too, seemed to quiver.

In the far reaches of the elvenlands — at the boundary, perhaps, between them and the lower reaches of Heaven — flows an enchanted river of blood. Some say it is the blood of martyrs, some the moonblood of the immortal Queen of Elvenhome, some the blood of the Earth Herself, who is forever giving birth. All who speak of it agree that to bathe in this river is to be healed of all hurts and to drink of it is to be restored in mind. That was the drink which Ralantre mistakenly sought at mortal throats, guided by an instinct which this world played terribly false. Perhaps one day I shall see him restored to his true form.

On the other hand, perhaps not. The elvenlands are unpredictable. One can never say what one will find on any given visit. All that can be guaranteed is that one will definitely learn something.

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Joan Howe served her writing apprenticeship as a teenager writing fan fiction. After getting degrees in anthropology and computer science and trying a variety of interesting jobs, she ended up on Boston and found herself writing. She credits the seed of this story to David J. Brown, whose comments on the divisions within sf fandom stimulated her to try an elf-and-vampire story.

Alan Gutierrez lives in Sedona, Arizona with his wife and daughter. He has been artist guest of honor at several sf conventions and has appeared in these pages a number of times previously. He is a well-known cover artist.

Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

THE BARGAIN

by C. Brochet

It was near midnight and the Grim Reaper's last job of the day. The instructions were simple enough: one Jonathan R. Sends, two and one-half months old, to be collected on May 19, 1995 at precisely 12:01 a.m. The child was to be found at a small hamlet in Quebec called Green Heaths.

The destination turned out to be a small weather-beaten cottage built on a piece of land gradually being reclaimed by the sea.

The air smelled of salt, and a cold wind blowing in off the Saint Lawrence river churned the sea to a white foam that crashed like thunder on the beach, while gulls circled crying overhead.

The Reaper entered the house and followed the scent of baby to a small gable-ceilinged bedroom at the back. Jonathan R. Sends was sleeping peacefully in his crib, his little mouth working as if he dreamed of his mother's breast and its gift of rich, warm milk.

Perhaps it was the scent of baby that made the Grim Reaper a trifle too eager, a trifle incautious. Whatever it was, no sooner had the Reaper reached towards the child, than a woman's voice sounded out of the shadows. "Wait!"

The Reaper froze, then slowly turned towards the dark corner from which the voice came. A stick figure of a woman, little more than a child, sat there in a rocking chair. She got up quickly, and the rocker bounded back and forth as if in protest. The woman held out her hands. "Please," she said. "Take me, instead."

The Reaper laughed with a sound to shatter glass ornaments.

"Just tell me what you want," the woman said, her voice rising in timbre. She advanced towards the Reaper. "Anything, but please don't take my baby. Please." She was shaking uncontrollably, but she came closer still. "He's all I've got in the world," she said. "I couldn't go on without him."

It was now 12:02. The time for cleaving had come and gone. This had never happened before. Should never have happened. And still the Reaper hesitated.

"I can't have any more children."

A moment passed. Then another. Finally, the Reaper's arm withdrew from the baby's crib.

"Thank you, oh thank you," the mother said. She advanced yet again. "You don't know how much this means to me. You won't be sorry. I'll give you anything you want in exchange. Anything."

The Reaper turned away.

Relief and elation made the young mother bold. She reached up to place her hand on the Reaper's sleeve, and accidently pushed aside the black cowl. She gasped. A beauty of uncertain age stood revealed. "Yes," the Reaper said, "I'm a woman — or was once, long ago."

"But how—"

"How could I kill?" The Reaper's smile was bitter. "Put on a pot of tea," she said, "and we'll talk."

The mother glanced towards the crib. "Don't worry," the Reaper told her, "he's safe for now, anyway."

The mother went to the kitchen at the front of the house. She put on the kettle, got out her best china teapot, and two matching cups and saucers.

The linoleum creaked, announcing the arrival of the Reaper. "You wanted to know how I could do it," the Reaper said. "Haven't women always dealt in life and death? We grow new life in our bodies, or shed the egg along with the lining of our wombs; we give birth, miscarry, become midwives; we care for aging parents and the sick—who better to cleave souls than a woman?"

The mother looked at her. "What stopped you, then?"

"Does it matter?"

The mother set the sugar bowl on the table, and went to the refrigerator for the cream. "I guess not."

After a moment, the Reaper said, "I had a child once, too—a little boy, much like yours."

"What happened?"

The Reaper's eyes met and held hers. "The Grim Reaper came for him one night," she said.

"Did he get him?"

The Reaper stared at her.

The mother bit her lip. "I'm sorry; I shouldn't have said that."

"Not at all," the Reaper said, "you were right to ask."

The mother made the tea, poured out two cups, and set them on the table. She sat down, and the Reaper sat directly across from her.

Artwork by Christina Wald

She lifted her cup to take a sip of tea, and the Reaper said, "You were expecting me, tonight; weren't you?"

Her hand shook, sloshing the tea about. "How did you know?"

The Reaper said nothing.

After a moment, the mother said, "What happens now?"

The Reaper took a sip of tea. "The Reaper retires," she said.

"Why?"

"Have you ever heard of the Grim Reaper coming for someone and not taking him?"

"No."

"No one else has, either; the tradition keeps it that way."

"I'm sorry—I guess."

The Reaper laughed. It seemed to come from a pit deep in the earth.

The mother looked suddenly worried. "Will there be a successor?"

"Have you ever known a time without death?"

"What about my baby?"

"That depends on you," the Reaper said. "There are special dispensations for members within the organization."

"You can't mean —"

"You said you'd give anything for the life of your child."

The mother licked dry lips. "Yes."

"Don't look so stricken," the Reaper said. "You're not the first mother to bargain for the life of her child."

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Constance Brochet lives in Quebec's Gaspé peninsula with her husband and four cats. The two great passions of her life are writing and nature. Other interests include ethnic cooking, fashion design, and psychic phenomena. Her training is in Social Sciences, augmented with courses in Journalism and Educational Technology (computers). She has worked as a teacher and freelance journalist and has had articles published in a local weekly, *Spec*, and the Montreal daily *The Gazette*.

Christina Wald has a BS in industrial design from the University of Cincinnati. She has done art for various role-playing game companies and for science fiction collectable trading cards. In addition, she is also gradually getting around to more convention art shows.

An Interview with
Gahan Wilson
by Darrell Schweitzer

Darrell Schweitzer: My guess is, you began drawing well before you began writing. Am I *right?*

Gahan Wilson: Yes. The drawing goes back to when I was a little tiny kid. Everybody I know, from serious painters to cartoonists to whatever, anyone who does any kind of graphic thing at any level of success, has been a doodler since childhood. They always cover their school books and notes and everything else with endless little doodles.

One time, when I held the august office of President of the Cartoonists' Society, and we were engaged in very serious negotiations with a publisher — a very big deal — and there these guys were; they were America's most distinguished cartoonists, a very formidable bunch, dealing with a very weighty matter; and I realized in the middle of this discussion — I looked down on my notes — that I was doodling. I looked around, and, sure enough, everybody else was doodling too. I knew it was hopeless. We weren't going to pull this one off. But that's specific. Doodling is a must.

You also have to be warped in some way. Presumably you drew skeletons and monsters as a kid.

Some drawings were saved. When my parents died, I came across this little trove of drawings my mother had put aside, with loving explanations she'd written in pencil as to what I had prattled as I did these things. There was one thing which I particularly like, which was, "Horrible monster come to kill us all." And that's very creepy. I have since encountered little kids, and if they are creepy little kids, there is a spookiness about their drawing which is formidable.

The most curious one I ever ran into was probably psychotic; he was terrifying, and he did these drawings which were just... The teacher had asked me to see them. She wanted me to comment on the brilliance of these drawings, and I wish I'd conned her into giving them to me, because they were fantastic. There was one I remember of a tree stump, and an axe in it. In the back is a Lovecraftian in-the-woods type house, and it was the most horrifying thing I'd seen in my life, all done with Crayolas.

After that, you say, "Why didn't anyone do anything about it?" I don't know why. I would be very worried, frankly, if I had a kid, and he started doing the sort of stuff I was doing. But, here I am.

Well, there's an American cultural prejudice that says that a kid who likes monsters and coffins and graveyards must be warped and we'd better fix him. But, of course, a lot of very creative people turn out quite well that way.

Yeah. It's not a universal, but very often people who manage to take obsessions or fears or whatever it is and turn them into art can take a what could be a very negative thing and turn it into a very positive thing. That process, or alchemy, hasn't been looked into much. People who work in this sort of stuff, in the arts, like Goya, and so on, are taking screams and throwing fits and working it into art, which is altogether mysterious; but it is positive. Occasionally, of course, there are mad artists. There's a famous English painter who did these wonderful fairies, and he killed his father and was put in the laughing academy for the rest of his life. So art did not save him, but by and large most artists that you know of who are active in this area are under control. It's work for them. They don't go out and kill people.

The creepy kid who did the drawing of house and the axe will either become a mass murderer or the Gahan Wilson of the next generation...

That's the thing. Colin Wilson has gone into the idea that the deviant, the weird person, has sort of a coin-toss as to whether he's going to become a positive or negative factor in society. There's the insistent *something* that's going on, and the artist turns it into a positive; but it could be very much of a negative. It's very iffy.

There are people here at the Horror Writers of America convention who think dark thoughts constantly, and their minds are working in strange, devious ways. You have these absolutely delightful conversations with them, while you're fantasizing this terrific stuff. You're crossing the street and all these one-liners come out. But you have to be careful when you're with... I don't know what you'd call them, just regular people. Sometimes you say something, and then you

realize, *uh-oh*... They look at you with this funny look.

How serious are we about all this? We joke that horror writers and horror artists are deviants who would otherwise be mass-murderers, but do we really mean this? There is a school of thought that all of this is so unhealthy that what these people really need is psychiatric help, at which point fantasy literature would disappear and everybody would be nice and sane and normal.

The big difference is that the fantasy people are not *crazy*. A serial killer is just a screwed-up ruin who doesn't understand the difference between what's real and what he has imagined. We'll imagine some spooky thing, but we know we're imagining it. Some fantasy writers are very open-minded about occultism or ESP or whatever, but a lot of them absolutely are not. They're very, very down-to-earth. They just don't believe in it at all. So they'll toy with these things, as *fiction*, whereas somebody who is in trouble doesn't realize it's fiction. This guy makes up something about this woman who is walking down the street, and he doesn't know he's made it up, and he thinks he's got to kill her because whatever he has made up is so offensive and horrible that she needs killing.

But people like that are crazy, pathetic, whereas we will make up some horrible thing and we know we've made it up, and we turn it into a story.

This brings us to the religious fundamentalist's argument that it is better not to entertain these thoughts at all.

That's the extremely negative approach. I grew up in the Midwest. I'm very fond of the Midwest, but the great problem with it is that everybody is constantly in denial and will always say, "It's a *nice* day," even if it's a horrible day, or "Isn't that a nice man?" They don't really mean he's a nice man. They'll compulsively blurt it out when they've just had a horrible, hateful thought about something. They'll deny it completely. Or the Brits will say, "I'm fine, I'm fine," when they're feeling just awful. You know an English person is in absolutely total depression if they say, "I'm fine, I'm fine," real fast like that.

So, not talking about something which is actually there is stupid. It just continues to fester. So this stuff has to be looked into. In a way, although I wouldn't want to push it too far, the most interesting thing about horror artists and writers is that they have come to terms with horrendous things and handle them rather well. But that is not to say they weren't appalled by them in the beginning. It may be just a sensitivity. As children, they were horrified. They saw, or understood, that things were more serious than most of their little contemporaries did, who were too dense to get it. So they had to deal with it.

Mark Twain, when he was a kid, saw his father dissected. There is a good argument that this really shaped little Clemens profoundly. All his anger with God and so on, as well as his humor. So I think trauma or heightened sensitivity is often the basis for humor. S.J. Perelman — he was a humorist, now completely forgotten — once said that the essential requisite for a humorist is an unhappy childhood. To a degree, he's right. The artist is startled into awareness in a way that other people aren't, and is forced to deal with it.

There must also be a matter of degree. Your traumatic childhood can't be so bad it crushes you. No large number of great artists came out of Auschwitz. It has to be more subtle, something which enables to artist to see behind the facade of daily life. And there's something else. You didn't just go on drawing horrible monsters come to kill us all, you made them funny. *So where did the transition occur between the straight-horrific and the humorous?*

I remember I was enormously attracted to Zen before it was fashionable, and still am, because it is enormously unserious. When a person achieves insight in Zen, instead of going El Greco and looking up heavenward with a saintly, teary-eyed stare into the clouds, they sometimes laugh uproariously and slap their thighs. They get the joke. Which means no disrespect.

One thing that annoys the heck out of me is that humor is treated as a lesser art, or a lesser insight than serious insights. If somebody is unfortunate enough to be humorous, they are enjoyed and admired and that sort of thing, but it's not as important as serious stuff. If a "serious" author does something humorous, this is considered to be one of his or her minor works. There are some who've busted through this. We've mentioned Twain, who forced his way, primarily with **HUCKLEBERRY FINN**.

> There will be humor in it...But the attempt will be to scare you. It'll be a roller-coaster ride. Quite nice.

Horror suffers the same way. It's a cliché, but horror and humor are absolutely identical. That's not an original thought, but I think it's true. They're both jokes, of a sort.

The best definition of a joke I ever saw was that a joke is the dispatch and wreckage of the train of thought. You set somebody up to move their minds along a certain path, and then you have this little trick that you do at the end which absolutely derails them, and they laugh because they're startled. A short horror piece has the same structure. You set them up, and then you go "Boo!" at the end; and they jump, or a great revelation comes, or there's a dawning, depending on how subtly it's handled. You realize that things aren't what you thought they were. Humor says things look this way, and that instigates a laugh. Horror — the spooky person — says, no, things aren't that way; they're this way. The result is fright... "Oh my *God*... It's a sudden re-evaluation, looking at things under a new light.

But then all art is really that. What for me defines an artist is that the artist is someone who has an insight and is able to communicate that insight to you, so that, having experienced that communication, everything is different for you from then on. Cezanne does his landscape. You see that landscape, and if you really get what he has done, even subliminally, you will never look at a landscape the same way, or tree branches, or apples on a table. He's changed it for you. He's seen something and been able to communicate that insight. That transforms you.

It's more than just a surprise. It seems to me that the best horror stories are the ones which are just as horrific the second time you read them. The way you tell a bad one is that, the second time around, it's like a spent match. So there must be more than a tion.

surprise or a joke.

Obviously the difference between a joke and *humor* is the same as the difference between a "Gotcha!" ghost story and a haunting ghost story. Humor gives you this lingering re-evaluation which is always with you. A really good spooky story does the same thing too. It alters your focus. But no, I use the joke to show the basis of both. You switch the mind. In a very crude version, you switch it abruptly.

In Buddhism there is a word they call which is usually translated as "suffering", and it is applied to all of life. It isn't really suffering; it's unsatisfactoriness or not-quite-rightness. It's that you can't quite get it right. No matter what you do, it's always a little bit off. You're trying to force life into a certain channel, and you're never quite there.

In humor, you're pointing that out. Thurber was all about that. You try to do something, and it's always askew. He would just increase the askewedness. The little Thurber man would go wrong. The crudest example is the banana peel. That's the basic joke. You start with that. The fellow wants to cross the sidewalk, and instead, crash, he's on his butt. It's very heavy-handed, but still it's quite a respectable joke. You can go on from there and end with all sorts of wonderful, subtle, cosmic humor.

It's the same with horror. You can start with "Ghaaa!" There's this awful thing that makes you jump by popping out of a closet. But if you turn the rheostat and have this dawning kind of insight, it's still "Ghaaa!" but it's much subtler and more moving. If it's the sort of story you're talking about — Machen, let's suppose — the same chill comes over you every time. Every time you reread somebody of that caliber, you're led a little deeper into his insights. It's a meditational sort of thing. It's inexhaustible. Each time it gets a little scarier.

> Some drawings were saved... One which I particularly like was, "Horrible monster come to kill us all."

It may be the absence of realistic pain which makes the difference in this case. The guy with the banana peel slips and does a Laurel-and-Hardy style bounce. That's funny. But if his skull splits open and there's blood and brains everywhere, that's quite another matter.

I did a thing long ago, for *National Lampoon* in its glory days, in which I had the cartoon characters who would get into accidents and be hideously injured. It was quite good. It was very effective graphically. Mickey would fall and his little black skin would split and you could see his skull. He'd be permanently damaged.

Yes. You can have rubber people and you can have real people. That's the thing that the Moral Majority and the like don't seem to understand. When there was such a fuss about these silly little cards which are Serial Killer Cards — Good grief! If our children have these cards they'll turn into serial murderers. They just underestimate pathetically what a serial murderer is, and how awful and how completely different from ordinary people he is. These guys are just incredible. But you don't become a serial murderer because you see some trading cards. Such a claim reduces the phenomenon to a completely silly level.

I am sure there are people out there who believe that all horror writers are in league with the Devil anyway. Well, aren't we?

Yes. All artists are dangerous. These people are perfectly right to feel threatened because they can't stand being questioned. So they are always under threat. The great authority-based institutions, be they religious or scientific, are always apprehensive because they cannot stand people who come along and say, "Now actually this is just something you've made up here."

There's no reason why first base should be to the right of home plate. It could well be to the left of home plate. It just worked out that way. Anybody who gets nervous about that kind of insight is going to get nervous if somebody comes along to make a joke about it. Lovecraft scares the bejezus out of them. They want constant assurance. They've live in this fragile little world and they want it to be un-fragile, and they're out of luck.

We're subversive. I think we're rather proud of it, too.

Yes.

Let's talk about your actual writing. What led you from cartooning to writing fiction?

I have always liked the cartooning form. It is essentially very literary. It is a part of a kind of narration. A good panel cartoon has a past and a future implied, rather nicely. It's just a moment in a continuing story, if it has any depth or solidity. When I was in the Art Institute of Chicago and learning my basics, I took a Fine Arts course which was just excellent — but at the time the Fine Arts world was completely dominated by abstract, non-objective art, which was a perfectly tried and valid form of painting and sculpture. But it was interested only the plastic qualities of painting or sculpture. They wanted no subject-matter. You were just to deal with the properties of the flatness of the canvas and the paint on the canvas, and that was that. They tolerated Cezanne and Goya for their painterly qualities, but they did not like any of what they called "literary" aspects. There could be no implied story. It was just paint on canvas. I was in trouble there, with these people. I was tolerated — and I continue to have very good friends among them — because I was a humorist. A humorist can get away with a lot: "He's just kidding around. Ha ha."

But, really, I didn't believe what they were saying. I thought it was malarkey. I continue to think that. I, by nature, prefer painting or sculpture that has literary connotations. I do not maintain that this is the Way or the Truth or the form preferred by God, or anything like that, but, by me, I like it best that way.

Cartooning is very definitely in that bailiwick. So, in the classic panel cartoon with a caption, if you take away the caption, the cartoon doesn't make any sense; and if you take away the carton, the caption doesn't either. It's a two-legged beast. It is a wonderful demonstration of this literary-visual combination working together. It's hardly unique to the cartoon, but, contemporarily, cartoonists, dadaists, and surrealists make the most obvious, direct use of it.

But the Egyptian were extremely into this sort of associaBut,

Their paintings and sculptures were constantly like this. Their language was based on an analog form — it turned digital, but it started out with drawings of things, and then these drawings became vocal effects, but there was still a visual base. The Chinese have the same situation. Their characters are visual puns. You can do all kinds of double-entendres with them. They do it constantly. You'll have a mural which will take a character from a word and blow it up into a full figure. Or in hieroglyphics, they'll have words which are similar phonetically, so to show that one refers to a human quality and the other refers to tables, there will be a tag at the end, to show you that this one is about people and that one is about furniture. They'll take that tag-thing and blow it up as part of the mural.

So, very early I was writing horrible little stories, which were about the level of Lovecraft's juvenilia, but it was always in tandem with art. I'd do little books and illustrate them. And I did a comic strip when I was in grade school somewhere: **DRIPPY DAN, THE DETECTIVE**. This is the first time I've ever mentioned this. Drippy Dan would just go on and solve little cases. It was in the school paper. I suppose that was my first published work.

I imagine Drippy Dan oozing like some Lovecraftian horror.

No, no connotation like that. It was just like Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck or Horace Horse...

No ichor, no tentacles.

No, no...

Did you grow up reading Weird Tales *and other pulp magazines and want to write that sort of thing from the start?*

Yes. The earliest stuff I read was comic strips. An enormous early influence was **DICK TRACY** by Chester Gould. He was a huge influence, because his stuff was extremely macabre. I was terribly disappointed with the Dick Tracy movie, as were many, because they made it into a Goodie Two-shoes kind of thing; whereas Gould was *very* scary. He was horrific. People bled and died hideously. There were dead bodies rotting, and all that kind of stuff. I loved it.

And **LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE**'s Harold Gray was also extremely good. He did horrible stuff. He would do the shock and shudder deals. Daddy Warbucks had two main assistants, Punjab, an Indian fellow, and The Asp, who was a snaky character, vaguely Oriental. At one point Gray brought in another character — I can't think of the name right away — who was a relative of The Asp, and had the same sort of characteristics. But he was the younger version and had a nice little sneakiness of his own. Through several adventures this character integrated into the whole team. You got used to him. He had fun. There was this business where they were going after these fiendish fellows. Gray had these pursuit panels, where you'd go deeper and deeper into some environment. I think this particular sequence involved a lot of shutters. It was quite good. And suddenly, one of the bad guys pops out and stabs this character in the gut and he falls dead. That's it. It was like Janet Leigh getting killed in ***PSYCHO***. It was very shocking. Gray knew just what he was doing. He brought that guy in there and developed him as he was leading up to — pow!

So that was very heavy, and slowly I came across the written stuff, Poe from early on, and the pulps. I was hooked totally.

When did you start to publish fiction? The earliest I know of was stories in Playboy *in the early '60s.*

I did a bunch of stuff for *Fantasy and Science Fiction* before then. Probably that was the earliest.

I can well imagine many of your stories as cartoons. They're short and they built up to some situation you could easily draw.

Sure. Some of them are very short. I did fables at one point, and they were very succinct and very cartoony. Again, I have no problem with crossover. When I'm writing, I visualize the scene, but it's perceived via words, so it's a different kind of visualization. But it can flow back and forth.

When *Classics Illustrated* started up again, they hired me to do Poe. They wanted to start off with somebody who was known outside of the comic-book area, so they could get some publicity. So I illustrated some of Poe's poems. I thought I knew poetry quite well — I could recite his poetry as a kid — but not until I gave myself the job of illustrating these poems did I get some insights I had never had before, by the process of turning them into illustrations. When you do an illustration, it's a very interesting effect. When I read, I don't have an inner screen. I just do this mysterious thing of reading. I am not consciously seeing stuff on a mental screen. If I'm to illustrate something, I then activate my visual talents, and bring the material outside, onto a piece of paper. In the process it showed me images in Poe's poems which I didn't know about. I hadn't realized, for example, in "El Dorado", that the knight is going on after death. I didn't really get that. Poe had him die, then go on undeterred. You know: over *the mountains of the moon, down the valley of shadow*. You boldly ride, if you want to go to El Dorado. That means don't be stopped even by death. You've got to keep right on going.

> The big difference is that the fantasy people are not *crazy*. A serial killer is just a screwed-up ruin.

And when I drew "Annabel Lee" I found myself drawing this man with this corpse of a child, and I realized that what we were dealing with was this grownup who was lying by the side of his darling, his life and his bride, who is a little kid. It's extraordinarily touching, and horrific too. But until I drew it, I didn't know about it. That's another mystery.

But, sometimes when I'm writing, I will look up and make a mental screen. I did this story for *Masques* about a guy who finds out about sea gulls, how they're organized and so on. He goes after them because he feels that birds shouldn't be getting out of their rightful level. He kills his wife and they get back at him. At one point he awakens and opens the window of his hotel window — his wife is this great fat creature, and she's been in the water and now is even huger, and all these gulls are holding her body up and flapping in unison — and he looks out and sees this great, blimp-thing floating in the moonlight. For that, I turned on the internal, mental screen to visualize it. I would constantly describe the thing as I could see it, and I would constantly up the visual.

very often when I am writing, I don't have a conscious visual image. How about you? Do you have a conscious visual image?

Most of the time, I suppose I do, though I don't draw all that well.

But you see something. I see something and I hear something. Hearing the language is as important as the imagery, but I think it's a balance between the two. I think probably the truth is that we are doing more visualizing and audio-fantasizing than we are ordinarily aware of. But I don't see any particular wall between them. In the movie stuff, I'm mixing the same completely. I'm still telling the same story.

What movie stuff?

I'm doing a short for Twentieth Century Fox, which is called ***GAHAN WILSON'S DINER***, and it is a Gahan Wilson cartoon. It looks just like one due to the new electronic miracles. I can do all these strange things with color and cross-hatching and so on, so I can produce visual effects which wouldn't have been possible before without — or even with — unbelievable expense. Now I've gotten involved with Disney and with Universal. Whether these things will actually end up being movies is, as always, totally problematical in Hollywood, as I am sure you know. But, so far, so good. But Spielberg and Amblin are negotiating. I designed a project for them which they seem to like very much. I hope they work. I would have a lot of fun with them, I'm sure. But, that's the movies.

Would you have the inclination to write a full-scale horror novel, not an item like **Eddy Deco's Last Caper**, *which depended heavily on its graphics, but a three-hundred-page, prose horror novel?*

Yes. I'm committed to do one, too, for Tor. I have it all worked out, but because of this aforementioned movie stuff I haven't managed to get around to it. I'm going to have to dive into it and just stay with it for a good stretch, at least. I find that if I am to do any writing, I have to get it done at a clip, without interruptions. It's very difficult to do something, then put it away, then haul it out and start it up again, put it away, and so on.

It's a spooky story. It's like these short stories I do which take place in a place called Lakeside, which is really Evanston, Illinois, in the past. It's a vague past, just childhood, not a date. You are a contemporary and you are remembering back when you were a kid. In these Lakeside stories they encounter various horrific events. In this one it's a big, big super-villain who is historical. I use him in a way I won't go into. He's there, and a kid encounters him, and the kid's mother and father have a conflict between them. Needless to say the forces of good triumph over evil in the end. But it's serious and the whole point of the thing is for me to follow a classic format, an escalating confrontation, and many horrible events occur, and finally the beast is brought down. There will be humor in it. I can't imagine it not having humor in it. But the attempt will be to scare you. It'll be a roller-coaster ride. Quite nice.

Is there a title for this yet?

The working title is **THE CHILD STALKER**.

What else are you working on these days?

I have been doing stories for anthologies and continue to do them. I am doing one for an anthology Zelazny is doing, about gambling. It's a nice, sinister, Somerset Maugham kind of story, about a casino, only very spooky and supernatural. It's got some cute interplay with the characters, and it's very visual, because I am constantly evoking mental images of this casino. It's on the coast in Portugal, this ornate, rococo thing. I remember being in such a place and thinking it looked very much like one of those fancy, wedding-cake tombs. So that's part of the feel of the story. And there are these movies, and of course the cartoons for *Playboy* and *The New Yorker*. That goes without saying. But I'll say it.

Thanks, Gahan.

❄

The Results of the Cauldron

Stories:

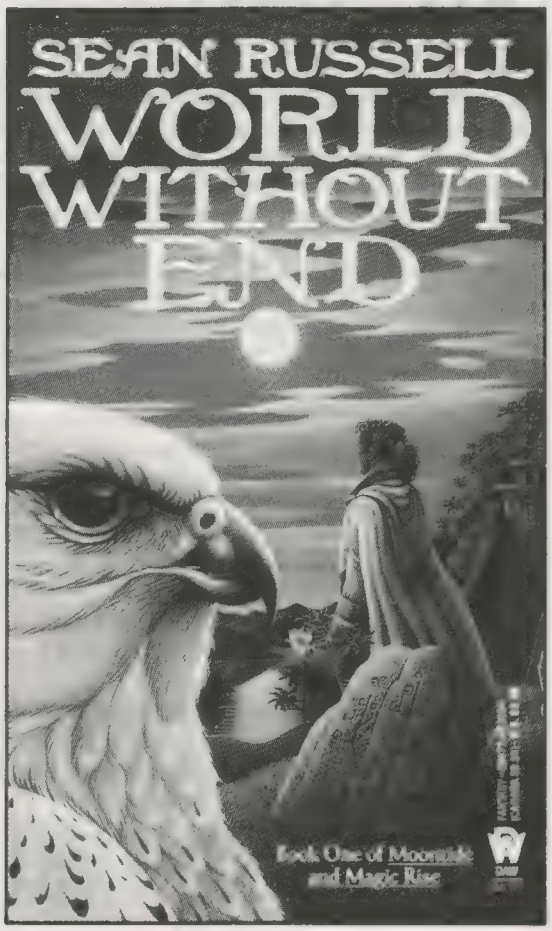
- 1st Place: **"Cream, Cake, and Colored Light" by Carol A. Leever**
- 2nd Place: **"Dracula's Lawyer" by Julia S. Mandala**
- 3rd Place: **"The Satyr's Song" by Laura J. Underwood**

Artwork:

- 1st Place: **James Balkovek for "The Satyr's Song"**
- 2nd Place: **Gail Butler for "Cream, Cake, and Colored Light"**
- 3rd Place: **Julia Lacquement for "The Mage Who Dreamed of Gryphons"**

Congratulations to all the winners! To vote for your favorites in *this* issue, use the ballot on page 64. Your interest and enthusiasm mean a lot to us at ***FANTASY* Magazine.**

THE LOST SECRETS OF THE MAGES...



The age of Mages is over, and all the secrets of their magical arts are thought to be lost to the world. There are even those who suspect that the last of the great Mages spent their final years scrupulously eradicating all traces of their craft from the pages of history—insuring that their art will never be practiced again. It is the dawn of a new era: an age of reason, science and exploration, and Tristam Flattery is one of its most promising young naturalists.

But when Tristam is summoned to the royal court of Farriand to try to revitalize a failing species of plant which seems to have mysterious, almost magical, medicinal properties—a plant without which, he is told, the aging king will surely die—he soon realizes that he has been drawn into the heart of a political struggle which spans generations, a conflict which threatens the very foundations of his civilization. And before long, Tristam is caught in the grip of a destiny which will lead him to the ends of the known world—a voyage of discovery that has more to do with magic than with science...

Book One of *Moontide and Magic Rise*

WORLD WITHOUT END

Sean Russell

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DAW FANTASY

Marion Zimmer Bradley Talks to Writers: The Writer's Toolbox, part 2

The last time I talked to you folks out there I was mentioning a sort of five foot shelf — or fifty foot shelf — of books every writer should read before venturing to submit a fantasy manuscript. I'm going to yield to popular demand and list some more important books.

I strongly recommend that every writer should have a copy of Bulfinch's **AGE OF FABLE**, and of course James Frazier's **THE GOLDEN BOUGH**. These ideas underlie the best of fantasy. I could create believable religions because I had spent my whole childhood obsessivexly reading books, not so much on religion, but on what makes religions work. In addition to those, of course, somewhere in your life there should be a copy of the King James Bible. Last issue I recommended it for the style of writing. Another reason is that it's probably the best way you can learn to use second person singular — as in thee and thou — properly. Another place to learn is in Shakespeare's plays. Don't listen to present day Quakers or the like; many of them use the second person singular less well than I do, and not at all grammatically. [*Note: Only a few use it at all. In all my years growing up in a Quaker household, I only met two families that used "plain speech" and, as Marion points out, it isn't used in the same way as the historical "thou". — HRJ*] Learn to do it right or don't try.

One of the things that will make any editor reach for a handy rejection slip is mis-spelled words. Most computers now have a spell-check program. If you don't use a computer and have no talent for spelling, have somebody who does do your proofreading. And by all means correct your manuscripts. If you're using a word processor, there is no excuse for not correcting the mistakes you notice. If you use a typewriter, I'd rather see a neatly corrected error than a clean page with mistakes. Some people seem to think that if it looks good, it is good. They don't want to mess up their nice clean manuscript with corrections. Believe me I'll appreciate it. I like knowing that you worked over your story until the last moment.

Who was it who suggested that genius consists of an infinite capacity for taking pains?I can't remember ...

Read books that set you a high standard of style. Here are some of my favorites: **THE TURN OF THE SCREW** by Henry James — if you want to know some of the really maddest fantasy; the works of A. Merritt, especially **DWELLERS IN THE MIRAGE**; even if horror is not your thing, the works of H.P. Lovecraft. It was from his story "Pickman's Model" that I took the quote which is — or should be — basic to every fantasy writer or artist. "Any third rate hack can splash paint around any old way, and call it a Witches Sabbath or a Black Mass, but it takes serious knowledge of the anatomy of the horrible to make such a thing really scare." The original quote is worth looking up and rereading.

One should also read a very fine series by the Andersons, Poul and Karen: the tetralogy **THE KING OF YS**. And, of course, the work of J.R.R. Tolkien, **THE LORD OF THE RINGS**. It changed a whole generation.

Some people dislike horror — I don't. I think all the works of Dean Koontz and the works of Jonathan Kellerman are basic to a real understanding of modern urban fantasy. And you can add your own favorites to these. It's your list.

— *Marion Zimmer Bradley*

Writers Talk Back: Rejected and Alone

by Parke Godwin

I never begin one of these articles without asking myself if the subject is of practical value to readers seriously working at writing. Has it been said before and better by someone else, or might it just possibly be some aspect not written to death? In line with our quest for the untrodden and untrite, let's consider two constants, like death and taxes, that will be with you always: solitude and rejection. How well do you handle them? The question is apt because you're going to know a lot of both.

Some people like myself take well to long periods of solitude. I cherish the time to think or read, listen to music or just woolgather. Good thing too, because the daily hours of writing are spent in absolute isolation and silence where even my cat Jinski gets short shrift. For that time, thought is necessarily disciplined into several channels at once — narrative progression, choices of character and dialogue, form, flow, overall intent, plus the weary knowledge that it will all need rewrite and polish as obviously as Bill Clinton needs speech lessons.

This is done alone, line by line, hour by hour, with fears

and insecurities jangling furiously and no company but the blood singing in my ears. By lunch time, with a scatter of pages on the floor, I'm relieved to turn on FM for Beethoven or Brubeck or to watch a trash movie on VCR. This is why I and so many other writers have such fun at conventions — hey, live people to be with!

Face it, some people simply can't stand to be alone. You've known them. They'll yak for hours on the phone or in person, talk after you if you escape to another room, gibble through television, gabble at you through a bathroom door. Unable to deal with silence, they drown it out with any sound, even white noise like the rush of a blank television screen or the Rush of Limbaugh, these being synonymous.

For this reason I suspect collaborations are so attractive to some, but the fact remains: Like birth and death, writing is a solitary passage on which no kids, cats, husband or wife, friend or significant other can intrude without ruinous distraction. The aforesaid must respect this necessary isolation, and wise ones do. Some writers maintain a workspace away from home. Another optimum arrangement between artists who are mutually significant is to live apart. For seven years in New York I lived in this arrangement, whereas the lady in point and I would not have lasted seven minutes in the same space without armed insurrection, so jealously did each of us guard our work time.

Call it the Bitch Mistress. Your work will demand all of your energy, attention and love for those allotted hours. It is the solitary art, but unique and proud as well. Who else writes with quite your insight, the profit from your personal experience, the shadings of your precise sensibilities? No one. In your honest work you've created something that's one of a kind, sometimes frustrating, frightening or lonely, but done while you walked alone. The results may be rejected by publishers or trashed by some or all of the reviewers, but this comes with the territory.

Rejection, now. How well do you deal with that? How in grade school always being the last kid picked for the ball team, or in high school when the golden boy / girl refused to acknowledge your acned and abysmal existence? When your husband / wife or otherwise said bye-bye and walked, taking most of your insides with them? We Americans have an almost pathological need to be liked. We place inordinately high value on acceptance and popularity; therefore our avoidance of rejection starts in early childhood. Rejection in any form is never pleasant but those who work in the arts get used to it. Correction — we try to get used to it. I was profoundly depressed and angry in '89 when four months of work on a novel was turned down by my new publishers. Good solid text, a knockout proposal, but — sorry, no sale, Pete. They wanted a two-book contract on something surefire for my first at their house.

"Give us two books about Robin Hood."

After private muttering, lamentations, and several tart letters to my then editor, I gave them **SHERWOOD** and **ROBIN AND THE KING**. Most of the reviews were very positive, but there were the inevitable sour notes. Kirkus has usually been of the opinion that, like a medieval leper crying "Unclean!" I should not be allowed within a mile of a typewriter. After twenty months of work, this is how they dismissed **SHERWOOD** —

" — plodding, off-key — historically implausible, colorless and vastly overlong — "

— while Newsday shot me down with " — simply not well written."

I didn't bother to keep the 1984 Kirkus review of **BELOVED EXILE**, which was less moderate than Nazi attitudes toward Jews. "Slovenly writer" and "ham-handed" were among the gentler caresses. Unfortunately I did keep their earlier review of **FIRELORD** —

"Godwin hasn't the style or panache needed for genuine revisionism — sputtering sentimentality — ultimately rather crude."

There, campers, is rejection in spades, though Kirkus is very even-handed; they dislike almost everything and are notorious for abrasive reviews. When they felt compelled to say something nice about **THE LAST RAINBOW**, praising it typically with faint damns, I scribbled across the review, "You can't lose them all."

We're all human. Good reviews make us feel omnipotent, bad ones consign us to outer darkness for a day or so. How do I parry such thrusts? Like any mature artist I seethe and mumble, darkly doubt my talent, cut my wrists, then say the hell with it and go back to work.

The foregoing love notes were hardly the unkindest cuts of all. There were one or two apparently so savage that the publisher didn't send them on, leaving their venom to paranoid imagination. I've read reviews of other authors so negative that the books must have literally closed out of town like an unsuccessful play — or perhaps, like some of my darkly reviled efforts, gone on to garner good sales and even an award nomination or two. This also comes with your territory.

Reading other people's bad reviews can be a sadistic or hypocritical pleasure. When they pillory an author you don't like, you can revel in it; if a friend, you can sympathize with a smarmy superiority, knowing your own withers unwrung. When it's your own work, you've been crucified. Oh, base injustice! The cretinous reviewer entirely missed your intent, must have merely skimmed the text, resented the material for being over his / her head, never liked this kind of book anyway — check one of the above. No matter how we rationalize, the lash is the lash. Many writers never recover from such flaying. One first novel was so thoroughly trashed that the mortally wounded author gave up, fled to New Jersey, and became a bartender. Many, *many* others, timid and terrified at the prospect of such laceration, don't dare to submit the fragile child of their soul (in which, of course, they would not change one celestially inspired word, and turn defensive or hostile at the mere suggestion), so a lot of fine or potentially fine writers never get out of the starting gate because they can't take the rejection.

You get so you can tell the ones who can take the hassle in their stride and who are going to make it. There's a local kid I met three years ago when he was eighteen. He'd already written his first novel and was into another. His stuff was godawful but he *finished* it. He knew about the necessary solitude. Something he wrote recently was still raw and callow but markedly improved over his first efforts. He's already had his first rejection slips, just as I had at his age. Within six months he's been married and separated, had his life torn up, but he's still writing. Sooner or later he'll be published and someone will take a hatchet to his work, but the kid's got a look about him that makes me pretty sure that won't stop him.

How about you, love? Can you take the solitude, the loneliness or a slap in the face, and keep going? Good trait to

develop because the bigger you get, the bigger rocks they throw, and how you dodge them will be a vital component in your development as an artist.

— *Parke Godwin*

Nearly every writer has something to say about feeling rejected and isolated. I telephoned writers on three coasts and asked them for comments. Carol Severance, who lives in Hawaii, Lawrence Schimel (who has sold us a number of short stories), and novelist Katherine Kerr have their say:

Some years ago, I did a book signing at a local grocery store. I sat at a small table in the meat and cheese department and for three hours directed shoppers to the rest rooms and apologized for having no food samples to share. I signed a total of two books. Now, *that's* rejection.

Whenever I discover one of my own SASEs in the mailbox, I experience a dull thud of disappointment. I slide quickly into depression, questioning why I ever started writing — and why I continue. Then I eat a handful of chocolate and my perspective changes. Is there really something wrong with my story, I begin to wonder, or did the editor just get up on the wrong side of the bed that day? Or maybe the magazine recently bought a similar... No, no, they couldn't have received two fantasy tales about a semi-sentient horny fungus. *[Ed: you'd be surprised. Sometimes it feels like story ideas float in the ether and half a dozen writers "tune in" at once, because suddenly they've all sent us similar stories.]*

I would stop by to share my frustration with another writer, but Hilo is a long way from anywhere and there are none around — and my modem got zapped in the last unexpected power outage. I attempt to draw on my experience as a journalist, to separate my words from my ego. But it doesn't work. I've been rejected. I've failed. I slide again toward despair.

That's when I get out **The Photo**, the one taken that day in the meat and cheese department. *That* was rejection, I remind myself. *This* is an opportunity for another, wiser, editor to acquire my work. I revise my story if it's needed, reprint it, and send it out to try again.

—*Carol Severance*

In high school, I was part of the track and field team. This has everything to do with my now being a writer. I joined the team when I was a freshman. Everyone else on the team was a junior or a senior, which meant they were all at least two years older, two years taller, and two years faster. Heredity playing no small factor, I don't think I would ever have been an especially fast runner, but I was certainly way out of my league on the team. I lost every single race I ever ran, and came in last for most of them.

No, it wasn't easy. Every time I lined up on the starting line, I knew I was going to lose. But every time, I still managed to summon some hope that maybe this time things would be different — maybe I would pass ONE other runner before crossing the finish line.

Writing requires that same sense of hope. Every time you submit a story, it is with the hope that it is accepted for publication. Sometimes you send a story which you know is wildly inappropriate for the market, like racing against an Olympic athlete, a wild gamble, but something makes you send it out. Every time that story lines up on the starting line, submission after submission, race after race, it's with the hopes that this time things will end differently.

There's something about the process that keeps you coming back, despite adversity. I mean both continuing to submit a story, to have faith in it until it finds the market it's suited for, and the act of writing itself—something keeps you coming back to it despite a long series of rejections.

While I was not fast, I found that I had stamina. I began running longer and longer races. (Ironically, as a writer I'm best known for my short-short stories.) Simply finishing rather than winning became my goal. Three miles, five miles, eight miles.

Even in these long races I was not fast. Sure, each race I tried to beat my own personal record, but I still came in last most of the time. And most of the time I found myself running alone.

This was a major change for me. I've always been fond of solitude, especially long periods of being in the woods, exploring and communing with nature. But as I grew older there was less and less of that time available, it seemed. There was always someone about — whether it was throngs of classmates at school or my sister watching TV in the next room while I was trying to do my homework.

Much of the racecourse for the longer events circled through the woods surrounding the school. I therefore had long stretches of time when I was left to my own thoughts. Even when one of my teammates slowed their stride to keep me company, to push my limits by trying to keep pace with them, I was too out of breath to chat as we wound through the woods. My thoughts were my only companion on these long runs.

I'm of the "camp" that finds physical motion aids in narrative motion; if I'm stuck in a story, a long jog or drive is just the trick to get things moving again. Simple, repetitive tasks, in general, are very good for freeing the subconscious, but those two in particular really work for me. It's not simply the travel — trains and planes put me right to sleep, and I'm too much of a backseat driver to let my mind relax while being a passenger — but I began to make up stories during these long blocks of solitude I had each day, running.

I wrote the stories down when I got home and began sending them out. I sent stories to the most inappropriate markets. I could have papered my room with rejection slips from *The New Yorker* and *The [Fill in the Blank] Review*, but I kept running, which meant I kept writing stories in my head, and I kept sending them out.

Then came time for college applications. There are big fat books that list all the colleges, which are very much like **WRITER'S MARKET** and other such tomes that list possible publication venues. But, rather than just reading about a school in the book and deciding to go, as I had been doing with submitting my stories, my father trundled me off in the car and I actually went and visited a dozen or so of the most-promising sounding colleges.

I tried this with the stories I was submitting, and actually read some of the magazines I was sending stuff. I began to submit to the magazines and anthologies I liked to read, instead of just the ones I read about.

And then, just before graduation my senior year, I got an acceptance letter from Marion for **SWORD & SORCERESS VII**. I was thrilled. My family said they were happy, as did my friends, but no one really understood what I had gone through to get there. Unlike the feeling of solitude I felt when I was running, I felt alone when it came to being a writer. Even when I came in last every race, I still had my teammates

to encourage me, waiting for me at the finish line and cheering when I came into sight.

These days, though I've had to give up running due to an injury, I still need my teammates for emotional support. They're my workshop, my fellow writers, who I can call up when I'm feeling down because my last 15 stories have just been rejected, or if I've got ten stories out on submission and I haven't heard anything about any of them for over five months now and I'm feeling anxious; whatever my crisis, they're willing to listen, and can sympathize.

Even still, it's not easy. I run each race alone, just me and the blank page. There are those days you just want to throw in the towel and give it all up, despite your friends and fellow writers who are cheering for you at the finish line. Usually, when I catch myself feeling that way, I turn to Rainer Maria Rilke's **LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET**, especially the sixth letter which opens:

> "You should not be without a greeting from me at Christmastime, when in the midst of the festivities your feeling of aloneness is apt to weigh more heavily upon you. Whenever you notice that it looms large, then be glad about it. For what would aloneness be, you ask yourself, if it did not possess greatness? There exists only ONE aloneness, and it is GREAT, and it is not easy to bear."

— Lawrence Schimel

How does it feel to have a book rejected thirty-seven times? Let me tell you. I know. Many years ago now I wrote my first book, **CATCH THE SHADOWS**, a historical novel set in Southern California during World War I. You've never heard of it, of course, because it was never published, although thirty-seven publishers had their chance at it. Oddly enough, the book had garnered me a first-class agent, who, being a woman of great patience and stubbornness, still represents me today. She's sold quite a few other books for me, ten already published, two others under contract, plus two volumes of a collaboration project. But **CATCH THE SHADOWS** she could not sell.

When she first sent it out, I wondered, faithfully every Sunday, if this would be the week the book would sell. The weeks kept coming, and finally, so did the rejections. The first one left me dejected, despite my agent's assurances that no one ever got published on their first try. The second, third, and fourth were progressively depressing. Somewhere around the tenth, my agent suggested rewrites, which I did, thus letting myself in for a new wave of hope. After the fifteenth, I lost count and hope both. My agent became irritated with the entire publishing industry, that they would turn down a book she thought so obviously salable. By then she'd had **SHADOWS** for close to two years.

Fortunately, I hadn't stopped writing during this miserable process. When I finished the long manuscript that eventually became **DAGGERSPELL** and **DARKSPELL**, my agent suggested that we give **SHADOWS** a "rest" at about thirty-five rejections. I remember a feeling of monstrous relief. Still, we had a few more rejections in us, **SHADOWS** and I. Once the Deverry series started doing so well, I wrote a fresh beginning, and the agent tried peddling it again to the two publishers doing Deverry. Both announced that bringing out a historical would only "confuse my audience." Besides, they said, the day for "mainstream historicals" had passed. No doubt, back when **SHADOWS** was racking up the rejections.

Will I ever try to sell **SHADOWS** again? I have no idea. Part of me would like to cut my losses; the other part keeps whispering that it really had some good characters, and that I've learned so much more about writing by now. My agent, perhaps for reasons of professional pride, would like me to do another rewrite and another round. But whatever happens to that manuscript, this sordid tale has a moral: if you want to be published, don't ever stop writing.

— Katherine Kerr

I'm surprised that only Carol mentioned a modem when discussing the "alone" part of being a writer. Both Katherine Kerr and Lawrence Schimel are active online and have their own "topics" on GEnie. As far as I can see, writers and fans all over America have taken to electronic interaction in huge numbers, and I sense a strong feeling of community on GEnie and CompuServe, the two services I call. The chance to "talk" to your peers, regardless of the hour or your location, is a potent antidote to feelings of isolation. Even an old, cheap 8088 IBM-clone and somebody's discarded 300-baud modem will allow you to get online, join the conversation, keep up with industry gossip, and give you access to writers' workshop areas.

Each author I spoke with mentioned some earlier training that had helped them cope with solitude and rejection: Parke Godwin was a stage actor, and surely must have endured hundreds of auditions; Carol Severance was an artist and a journalist; and so on. As an editor, I *do* rejections; I don't think I'd be very good at all at *taking* them. At the same time I know that we can't — and wouldn't want to — publish everything. So we hope those rejected can take a detached, professional attitude, polish their skills, and continue trying to entertain us all.

When I phoned Katherine Kerr to ask her to contribute her counterpoint to Parke Godwin's column, I asked her how she coped with rejection. "Rage, rage!" she replied, cheerfully. "But you know, I've hardly ever had anything rejected." We talked a few minutes more and then she said, "You know, I just remembered that my first novel was rejected 37 times." I found it interesting that at first, she'd forgotten the old rejections now that better times had come. Perhaps that's the knack, to learn to forget the past and just try again.

At *MZBFM*, either Marion or I can reject a story, but it takes agreement from both of us to buy one. We probably reject twenty stories for every one that gets published, and recently the number of submissions to the magazine has been steadily increasing — which means that unless we publish more frequently, an even higher proportion of stories will be sent back. As a courtesy to the writer, we do our best to pinpoint the reason. We often add hand-written comments, paying compliments when we can. And both Marion and I read manuscripts with a pen or pencil in hand. If your punctuation or spelling are really awful, we only correct a few points early in the story. So if you get your ms. back all peppered with comments and corrections, don't lose heart, especially if the comments go all the way through the story. At least we read it, and felt you had made a valid attempt at professionalism and would appreciate further suggestions for improvement. So don't get mad; rewrite your story and try it somewhere else!

— Rachel E. Holmen

❄

by Edwina Mayer

Alyana brought him a thick slice of watermelon, dripping with sticky pink juice. In the glare of the full-spectrum lights, its rind of variegated green, its firm vermilion flesh and shiny black seeds seemed to glow from within, making it difficult for Nicholas to pull his eyes away and look at Alyana when she spoke.

"There could be much more, if you cooperate. Strawberries. Ripe peaches. Roast chicken. Chocolate layer cake. Whatever eleven-year-old boys like." She regarded him for a long moment with flat, jade-green eyes. "Or, we could go on as we have."

Nicholas didn't answer. He was thinking that he found the shade of red Alyana had chosen for her hair this time particularly distasteful, and that it clashed miserably with the watermelon.

Alyana folded her arms and tapped her slender foot. "It's up to you, of course, Nicholas." When he still didn't speak, she shrugged, then snapped her fingers. "Come along, Gresh," she said. "Let's give him a chance to consider."

A tall, heavily-muscled creature, not quite man, but not beast either, straightened up slowly from where he slouched just inside the door. He blinked lazily at Nicholas with muddy eyes set deep beneath a high brow ridge, then pulled thin, bluish lips back from long teeth in something that resembled a grin, though it clearly had nothing to do with humor. Nicholas took a step back.

Alyana's look of mildly amused puzzlement reminded Nicholas of the faces of zoogoers as they watched the great apes. "Are you jealous, Gresh?" she asked. "Nicholas, you'll have to forgive Gresh for staring. I've had him since he was an infant, and in all that time, he's never seen another living creature. You must be quite an oddity."

"He's lonely," Nicholas said without thinking.

"Of course he's not. He has me. Gresh!" she said sharply, "Come along!" They left then, Alyana locking the door behind them, and Nicholas was alone again.

Except for a neat stack of art supplies in the corner, the room was entirely white. White walls and floor. A white metal cot with white bedding. A low white-lacquered table. There were no windows, and the smell of wall paint permeated the room. The bank of lights mounted on the ceiling was intended to mimic the midday sun, but the effect was too brittle.

Nicholas turned his attention back to the watermelon, his mouth filling with saliva. It was not that he was hungry, exactly. Since Alyana had deposited him here, the food had been plentiful, but the diet of rice, boiled potatoes, and oatmeal was as deliberately bland as the room was devoid of color. For a moment Nicholas was unsure whether to eat the melon or simply look at it. Then he inhaled its crisp, summer aroma, took a bite, and was transported as the sweet juice trickled down his chin. It was gone too soon though, reduced to a gnawed rind. Nicholas lay down on the cot, his face toward the wall, cursing Alyana for her cleverness.

When she had first locked him in here, the solitude had frightened him most, and though he found the room's monotony offensive, in much the same way as Alyana's unnatural hair, he did not immediately comprehend its power or purpose. Only when she brought a pot of red geraniums smelling maddeningly of carrots and fresh air — and then took them away — did he began to understand. By the time Gresh delivered the art supplies the next day, Nicholas's palms itched to cover the walls with brilliant design and texture. But he knew that was exactly what Alyana intended, and he was determined to leave them untouched. The geraniums were only the first in a long series of tantalizing fragments from the rich outer world, however, and with each new lure his resolve slipped a little.

Nicholas sat up and bit his thumbnail. Perhaps it was foolish to oppose her. And what harm was there, really, in trying to make his life a little more pleasant until he could find a way out?

He sifted through the art supplies,

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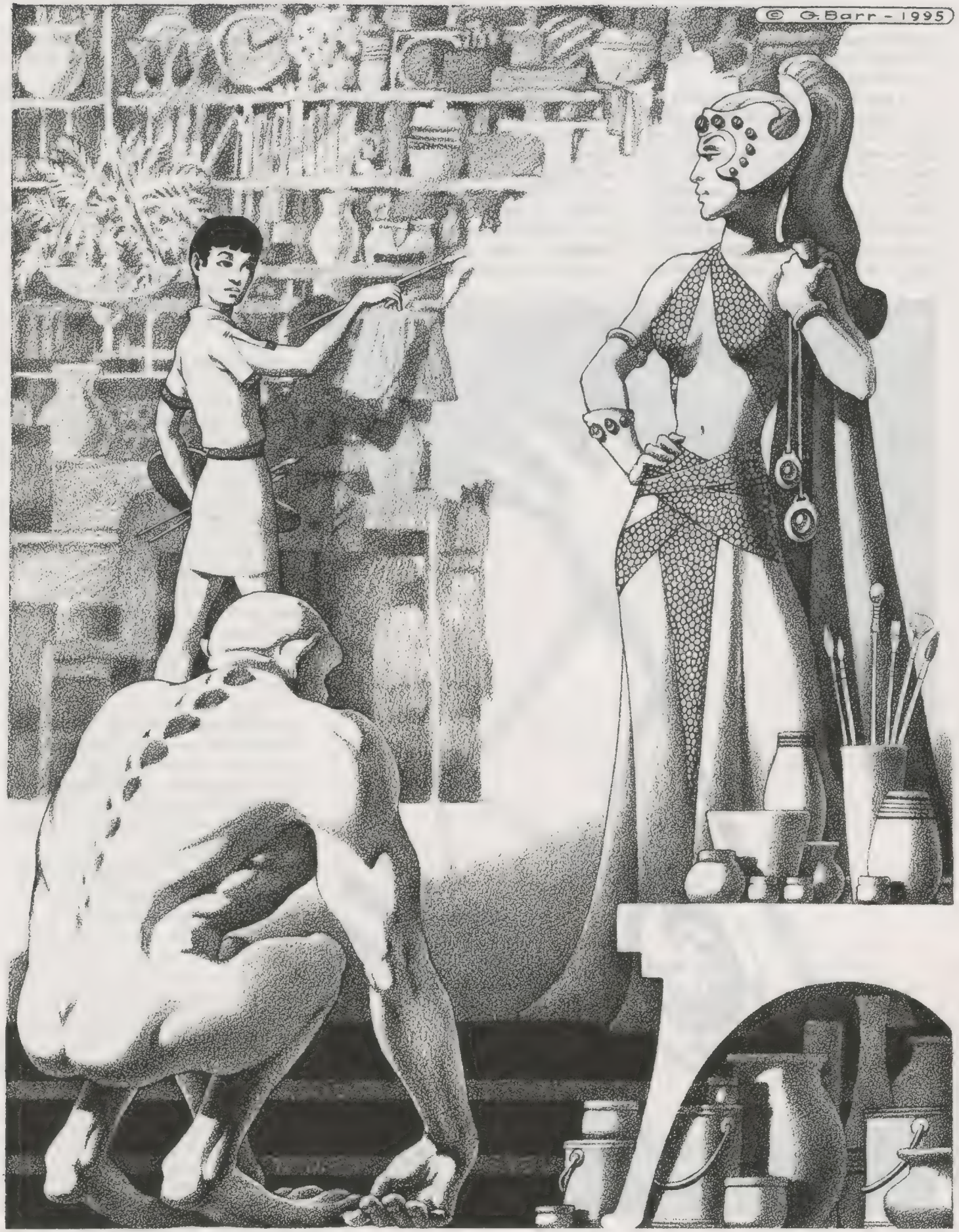

Artwork by George Barr

wondering how to best demonstrate his change of attitude. Finally, he settled on something he knew would appeal to Alyana's limitless vanity.

He had a huge talent augmented by the technical knowledge he had acquired at the studio, and Nicholas used them both as he meticulously laid out the details of the painting. After a while, a black and white cameo on a sparkling silver chain, perfectly realistic in every detail, took form. As he added the last shadows that would give the necklace depth, he felt a familiar doubt. He stood back to look, then reached out gingerly, and with a long sigh, removed the pendant and chain from the canvas. Once again, he had succeeded in plucking an image from his own mind and giving it solid reality.

As quickly as it welled up, he squelched a bubble of self-satisfaction, reminding himself of a rose he had created once and offered with swaggering aplomb to a slender bejeweled patron with long red hair. That single blossom, formed of imagination and pigment, but mostly of pride, had transformed his existence. Nicholas stowed the cameo in his pocket, determined that pride would never again betray him.

Artwork by George Barr

"So," Alyana said when he gave her the necklace, "you've made the wise decision, after all." Her thin, little smile failed to conceal the underlying triumph. "Tell me, would you like something special?"

"I want to go back to the other room," he said softly, thinking of the warm sunlight that streamed into the second floor bedroom where he had stayed when he had first arrived. That was before he had recognized his status and stopped cooperating with Alyana, of course.

Her slender fingers with their long, lacquered nails appraised the cameo hanging between her breasts. Then she shook her head. "I think not. This room seems to be your inspiration, Nicholas. Perhaps later, if you convince me your conversion is genuine."

He wanted to grab the chain, right up by the hollow of her throat, and twist and squeeze until it bit into her tender flesh, but he settled for clenching his fists. He knew he wasn't quick enough to get to her, or strong enough to do her any harm, and even if he were, there was Gresh, posted just inside the door as always, like some huge, bi-pedal watchdog with disconcertingly sentient eyes.

Alyana watched Nicholas half-expectantly, almost as if she wanted him to come after her, but he remained still and silent, respectful of the power in Gresh's long arms. "Well," she sighed, "I'll leave you. I anticipate something interesting when I come back, though. Don't disappoint me."

When they were gone, Nicholas sat down on the cot and drew his knees up to his chin. He squeezed his eyes shut, thinking he was much too old to cry, and that all the tears in the world wouldn't do him any good with Alyana. He hadn't realized how much he had been counting on the cameo to get him out. But then, he had always been too apt to look for quick solutions to long-standing problems.

Coming away with Alyana was just another case. When she had visited the studio, Nicholas was just completing his second year of crushing boredom, spent studying the rudiments of color mixing and perspective with students of merely ordinary talent. Though even the stodgiest of the masters admitted

that his own gift was unique, they refused to abandon their familiar instructional hierarchy. "Technique first, inspiration later!" So Nicholas had plodded along, chafing all the while. And then Alyana had come, searching for a student with something special, she said, and Nicholas had created the rose. He had come away with her willingly enough — not thinking to ask the price of what she offered — and from the beginning, she had encouraged him to paint whatever he could dream. But it hadn't taken him long to realize that he was really just another of her acquisitions, another of her captive pets. And on that account, when he wasn't frightened out of his wits by him, Nicholas felt an odd kinship with Gresh.

The boy wiped his eyes, and looked around at the bare walls. Even if she wouldn't let him leave, he could make his cell more appealing. Taking up a box of pastels, he doodled idly in one corner until he had created a small table of burnished wood topped with a blue vase full of daisies. He surveyed the remaining expanses of untouched white, and began to plan the rest of the room.

There would be soft, overstuffed chairs in bright prints and low tables holding fascinating treasures; a rock collection containing the finest geodes and fossils, and a tank filled with neon-hued tropical fish; stacks of jigsaw puzzles and a grandfather clock; model aircraft and a mechanical squirrel. And windows that looked out into a garden. Further embellishments would occur to him as he worked, he was sure, but these would keep him busy for now. And he hoped they would be enough to convince Alyana of his sincerity.

Lunch was cheese and plump, green grapes. Alyana watched him eat, and Nicholas suspected that she had chosen the fruit to match her eyes. Delighted with the little table and bouquet, she offered to bring him a special snack later in the afternoon. "Any delicacy you would like," she said.

"Lemonade." Though he could almost taste it, his pleasure in its anticipation made him feel like a trained animal. Pushing the feeling aside, he went back to work.

Alyana settled in a chair that hadn't been there at breakfast, while Gresh squatted silently in a corner, the flicker of his eyelids the only clue that he was not some grotesque statue that Nicholas had created for Alyana's amusement.

"Rats!" Nicholas looked disgustedly at a queen conch shell he had been working on for more than an hour. Though he had reached the point at which its graceful curves should have taken on three dimensions, something was askew, and it remained flat. He got out the bottle of turpentine and muttered under his breath as he laboriously removed the shell.

Alyana peered over his shoulder. "That's inefficient," she said.

"I suppose you've got a better idea?" Nicholas wished she'd go away and let him work.

"Careful how you speak to me, Nicholas," she said, but she continued without waiting for an apology. "Now, as it happens, I do have a better idea." She snapped her fingers for Gresh.

They returned in minutes, Gresh carrying a bucket of white paint and an assortment of large brushes and rollers. "It's what we used on the walls," Alyana said. "When you make a mis-

Artwork by George Barr

take, wouldn't it be easier just to paint over it?"

Nicholas nodded thoughtfully. For a while, he was aware of Alyana watching him work, but then the vision overtook him. He didn't notice when she and Gresh left.

The full-spectrum lights allowed him to paint whenever he wanted, and over the next days, he stopped only briefly to eat or sleep for a few hours. As the work took on reality, his sense of desolation lifted, and Nicholas thought it would not be so horrible to spend the rest of his life like this. Then Alyana would come with her arch remarks and proprietary air, and he would be reminded that if the creating was good, his situation was bad.

From time to time, he made a mistake. Then he took one of the large brushes, dipped it in the white paint, and obliterated the offensive object, making it as if it had never been.

---o---

The room was almost finished, precise in detail, nearly every available inch of wall and floor transformed into some complex, three-dimensional object. When Alyana brought his lunch, Nicholas was contemplating the last area of blank wall, a rectangle roughly four-and-a-half feet wide and seven feet tall. He didn't hear her enter, and jumped guiltily when she spoke.

"You've done well, Nicholas." She moved closer to him, and he was surprised that he could look her in the eye. He had grown. Or perhaps Alyana had never been as tall as he imagined. "We'll have to find a special reward for you," she said slowly. She was very near him and there was something in her opaque eyes that made him blush. They stood like that for a moment. Then Nicholas looked down, and Alyana uttered a short, dry laugh.

"Ah, well," she said, "we've plenty of time. Gresh has prepared another room for you. All white, just like this one. I think it's almost time for a showing. This room as the finished product and the new room as a work in progress. You'll do a demonstration for the guests."

"Will there be other people here?" Nicholas's voice was very low. He

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stared off into space for a moment, trying to reckon how long it had been since he had seen anyone but Alyana and Gresh. Months, he thought, though it was impossible to be certain. Before he had painted the grandfather clock, there had been no way to mark the passage of time.

"If you're very good, I may allow you to talk with them. But you'll need to finish up in here first." She pointed to the white rectangle. "What's that going to be?"

"It's the focal point," Nicholas answered. "Something special — for you."

She seemed pleased. "When will you be finished?"

"This time tomorrow, I think."

"That's good," she said, nodding. "I'll bring your dinner."

"Alyana," he said, "don't come back till tomorrow. I want to surprise you." He nodded toward the tray. "There's plenty of food here."

"As you like." Her smile was startlingly candid and for just a moment, Nicholas wondered if something had shifted. Then she snapped her fingers for Gresh, and he knew that, whatever the smile had meant, nothing had changed.

Nicholas waited until he could no longer hear Alyana's retreating footsteps before he started on the rectangle. Satisfaction was a long time in coming. Twice, he took the big brush, and painted out several hours' work. But in the end, he had created a perfect open arch of ancient, lichen-encrusted marble. Perched atop the keystone, a laughing satyr beckoned toward worn stone stairs that descended into the pleasant, dark green coolness of a garden. Seen through a fountain's fine spray glittering up through filtered light, the scene was a masterpiece of realism and perspective that drew the eye beneath overhanging elms along a narrow path edged in waist-high ferns and lilies. Leaves rustled with the furtive movements of animals, too shy to show themselves, but undoubtedly there. Nicholas finished with a brilliant little bird of red and black, who foraged daringly just beyond the arch. Then he amused himself by feeding the remains of his lunch to the little fellow while he waited for Alyana and Gresh.

- - - o - - -

Alyana glided into the room carrying the usual covered tray, and was followed, predictably, by Gresh who stationed himself just inside the door. When she saw the stone archway, Alyana put the tray down without bothering to show Nicholas the delicacies it held, and stood directly in front of the opening, gazing down into the garden. The red and black bird flittered about, trilling merrily as he feasted on bread crumbs.

She turned wide, sparkling eyes to Nicholas, her lips slightly parted. "It's ... amazing, Nicholas," she said. "It looks so real."

"Everything I paint is real."

"Yes, of course," she said absently. Turning back to the archway, she looked out into the garden for a long time. "Can I go in there?" she asked.

Nicholas shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. "Well, yes, I suppose so, only ... "

"Only what?"

"I don't know if it's safe," he said. "I'm not sure what's down there."

Alyana shot him a sharp look. "You painted it, Nicholas."

"Yes," he nodded, "but I don't know what's behind the things I paint. I don't know how far it goes ...." She stared at him expressionlessly. "Maybe you should take Gresh with you," he offered.

She raised finely penciled eyebrows in a parody of innocence. "Really, Nicholas, do you think I'm so foolish? Gresh, stay here."

Gresh looked from Alyana to Nicholas, and back to Alyana again. Then he settled himself in the corner to wait while she descended the stairway.

The little bird pecked away at tiny specks only he could see. Kneeling, Nicholas reached out his hand, and the bird hopped on his forefinger. As he set the little creature down gently on the edge of a wicker table, Alyana's delighted laughter wafted up to him from deep within the garden. Nicholas watched her as she strolled toward the fountain, engrossed in the intricate details he had created, never looking back. Then, something else caught his eye as it moved out of the shadows between Alyana and the arch.

"Gresh," he whispered, "look." He held his breath as Gresh stood to his full height, and moved forward to peer into the garden.

When Nicholas had been working, he wasn't sure if he was getting it right. He'd seen only one example, after all. The creature he had created was very much like Alyana's pet, but slighter and more delicate, and moved with a grace that the heavy-bodied Gresh lacked altogether. Gresh gave Nicholas a long, penetrating look. Then he strode through the arch and into the garden to meet his mate.

Quickly, with shaking hands, Nicholas pried the top off the can of white paint, and began to slap brushfuls over the arch. But he was too slow. Gresh heard the wet sloshing as the brush smacked against the wall. He grabbed the female by the arm and, pushing Nicholas roughly out of the way, pulled her after him through the diminished opening. At the same time, Alyana turned, attracted by the commotion, and rushed back up the staircase. "Nicholas!" she shouted as she ran. "What are you doing?"

Nicholas and Gresh locked eyes for an instant, and something passed between them. Then Gresh snatched up the brush from where Nicholas had dropped it, and rapidly closed the remaining aperture with huge long strokes. It was not until the last stone of the arch disappeared beneath a purifying coat of white that Alyana's screams ceased.

All was quiet in the room for a while. Then the little red and black bird began to sing.

❄

Edwina Mayer is a former high school teacher who lives in Champaign, Illinois, with her husband and two young daughters. She says she has been a storyteller since she was a child, but has only recently transformed that into being a writer. This is her first professional sale.

George Barr has been a professional artist since 1960 and was this year's Artist Guest of Honor at Worldcon. He has received a Hugo as Best Fan Artist.

Artwork by George Barr

Wouldn't Know If It Bit You

by Jennifer Cush

Helen walked out of the bookstore with a bag of fantasy novels and a small piece of sculpture, all gifts for her niece, whose sixteenth birthday was next weekend. She paused in the parking lot and looked with a sigh at the statuette in her hand. The dragon was a pudgy, cute little thing, curled around a ceramic tree stump. It lay on its back, all four feet in the air, peeking endearingly from under one clawed forepaw, looking for all the world like a scaly, pastel puppy. Its huge eyes were long-lashed and innocent, and it had a red ribbon tied around its neck in a huge bow.

"If I see one more cute little dragon, I'm going to puke," Helen told the statuette. "You're almost as bad as those troll things with the neon hair." She shook her head. "But my niece will love you. She wouldn't know a proper dragon if it came up and bit her!"

She closed her hand around the statuette and continued toward her car. Carefully, she balanced herself on the curb, fighting her full hands to get the key in the door.

Just as the key slid into the lock, hot pain exploded in the hand holding the statuette. With a yelp, she startled backwards, lost her balance on the narrow curb, and crashed to the cement.

After a moment of stunned breathlessness, she carefully set the statuette down beside her and inspected her hand, expecting to find a bee or wasp sting. Instead, she saw a raw gash across the pad of her thumb. A few drops of blood dribbled across her palm. "Stupid statuette! Must have sliced myself on a jagged edge or something. Well, let's be little more careful this time, why don't we," she said to herself.

She climbed to her feet and turned to retrieve the statuette. In the place where she'd set it was only the ceramic stump. The dragon that had curled around it was gone.

An angry buzzing noise distracted her and she looked up and froze in her tracks. The dragon was just landing on the roof of her car. It arranged its wings carefully across its back and stared at her indignantly. Helen grinned and relaxed when it ran both paws over its muzzle, exactly like a mouse cleaning its whiskers after a meal. Nothing that *cute* could be any kind of a danger.

The dragon's glare darkened perceptibly at her grin and it pulled itself to its full, potbellied height. "Wouldn't know a proper dragon if it bit her, indeed!" it said to her in a small, squeaky voice that sounded just like a mouse on helium. Helen snorted in an attempt to hold in her laughter. She truly didn't want to offend the poor thing.

"Well, lady, now you've been bitten by one! And you didn't know it either!" She could hear a definite "so there" tone in the little thing's voice, and could no longer hold back her laughter. It burst out of her, and she couldn't stop it. Her eyes watered fiercely as she looked up at the creature on her car's roof.

The dragon gave her a truly malevolent glare from its limpid, golden eyes, and she nearly wet her pants, she laughed so hard. It was like having a hamster angry at you. The dragon made a hrumphing noise, opened its mouth, and her bangs sizzled away in a crispy mass. No longer laughing, Helen batted frantically at her hair until the flame was gone, and then turned to the dragon, ready to give it a piece of her mind. It turned up its muzzle at her glare, buzzed its wings, and flew off.

She watched it for a moment, and a thought occurred to her. "Hey, get back here!" she yelled after it. "Now what am I going to give my niece for her birthday?!"

❄

Jennifer Cush is a college student in Dallas, Texas studying English and Elementary Education. She has been writing stories since she was twelve, but this is her first sale.

Real Musgrave is known for his whimsical style and his beautiful wife Muff. His Pocket Dragon™ figurines are collected around the world and have their own Collector's Societies in Europe, North America, and Australia. He says that while he is not so sure about proper dragons, he has never been bitten by one of *his* "Real" dragons.

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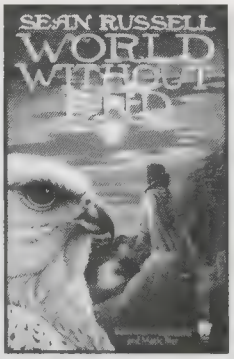

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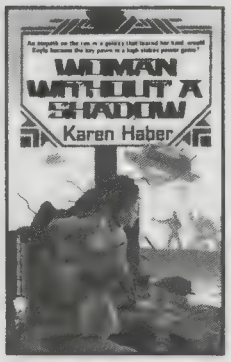

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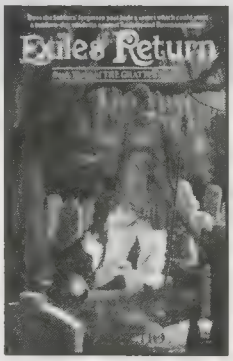

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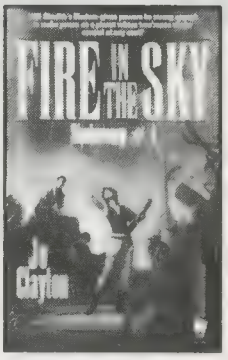

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A SUNSET

by Rycke Foreman

The djinn thought that Herman's first wish was a valid one:

"I wish I was very handsome. Appealing to women, you know." He said this in his funny little voice, while bright red blossoms bloomed on his cheeks. "Sexy, irresistible. Sleek, even."

"Very well," said the djinn. With the wave of one mighty hand, a new man emerged — a man who would no longer be known as Herman (that name was *so* inadequate for the gentleman who stood in front of him), but possibly Arman or Armond. Indeed, the Herman who had brushed his sleeve up against the lamp was gone: no more horn-rimmed glasses that distorted his sheepish, watchful eyes; his meager, rounded jaw was now square and sharp. Herman (or rather, Armond) no longer slumped, but held his shoulders erect and proud, his spine stiff — he seemed to have grown a full five or six inches; rips, from his now insufficient suit, resounded throughout the room as his biceps, triceps, and gluteus expanded.

The man turned, glancing into a nearby mirror. Herman would have gasped and said "Dear me!" but Armond simply studied his new face, held fast his magnetic-blue eyes, fluffed his already perfect hair. "You really are a genie, then, aren't you?" he asked in a strong, powerful voice.

"A djinn, actually."

"But you can perform magic — I mean, really *do* magic."

"Certainly. Did I not state that clearly enough to begin with?"

"Yes, but of course I thought you meant party tricks or something. Pulling rabbits out of hats, that sort of rubbish."

The djinn merely smiled, thinking: Now comes the greed. The djinn was, of course, correct.

"I want power. Power," Armond said, as if savoring a thick, juicy T-bone steak. He smiled slightly, unmercifully. "Yes, lots of power. Not something so trivial as the Presidency or some hick oil tycoon; I want the *real* thing, the power to sway millions...No, billions. I wish for the world to do my bidding, bow at my feet if that is my command. I want —"

"You would like to feed off the nations?" the djinn finished for Armond.

"No! I want to be fed *by my* nations..." A maniacal grin slashed across his now-striking face — Armond knew what his third wish would be "... forever."

Just as the djinn suspected. "Is that your final wish?"

"Yes."

"State it as a wish, if you please."

"Very well." The grin became wicked. "I want to be immortal. I wish it."

Preparing to grant his nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandth, nine hundred and ninety-eighth and -ninth wishes — two of the last three wishes,

Artwork by George Barr

after which he could regain his freedom — the djinn inquired, "May I ask of you a few questions?"

"If it's quick," the man snapped.

"Do you belong to any certain faith, Mr. Leech?"

"No."

"Do you particularly enjoy Italian meals?"

"No. When I was...him, I suffered quite badly from indigestion."

"Do you participate in many outdoor activities — hiking, swimming, sunning yourself at the beach?"

"Not in the least."

"One final thing, Mr. Leech. There will be...certain limitations to your immortality. Will that be a problem?"

"What sort of limitations?"

"Nothing too difficult to avoid." Save for one, the djinn thought.

"Fine, fine. Just get on with it."

"Your wish is my command." As the djinn finished bringing Armond's wishes to pass, he quickly granted himself the hundred-thousandth wish, the single wish granted to a djinn. His legs — until now a funnel-shaped mist — materialized beneath him. He exercised his restored limbs with a deep knee-bend. Standing up, the djinn (now Frank Tackerton, since he was now, finally, again a human being) made hastily for the door.

Behind him, Armond growled, "Wait a minute! I can't see myself." Armond was looking in the mirror; it revealed a room full of everything that should be there...except him. "Where is my reflection?"

Frank didn't bother to answer. Instead, he threw the front door open and gazed upon a sunset so glorious. His shadow fell long within the room.

The vampire's scream lingered, even after Armond Leech had been reduced to ashes. Frank shot one last glance at the remains that were littered before the looking glass, then left.

It was a fine day to save the world, especially since it was the first fine day he'd experienced, as a man, in centuries.

❄

RYCKE FORMAN has had stories and poems appear in a number of horror publications but this is his first professional sale. His background no doubt explains why the only piece of personal information he supplied in his bio is the proper drop-height for his weight "should I ever find myself in a hangman's noose", he notes.

GEORGE BARR illustrated two stories for us this issue — and didn't have to draw any dragons at all this time. He was Artist Guest of Honor at the 1994 World Science Fiction Convention, held in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and has won several Hugos for his work. He live in San Jose, California and is a frequent contributor here.

SO GLORIOUS

Letters

ARTISTIC LICENSE

Wendy Sornberger, Redford, NY

I'd like to express my admiration for Gail Butler's artistry. I can't draw a straight line, so I have great respect for those who've been given such a special gift. I almost expected that beautifully — and realistically — drawn cat to jump off the page I was reading and curl up in my lap for a snooze. Now that's talent!

Gail assured me she doesn't know **any***body in Redford, NY. (Seriously, I agree; great cat.)* — ***REH***

HOPEFUL REJECTIONS

Robert Ferrigno, Farmingdale, NY

I would like to thank you for your recent consideration of my story. You managed to give specific recommendations and positive comments, a difficult task for any editor, I'm sure.

Particular thanks also go out to Rachel Holmen, who found time despite her considerable duties as publisher to write that she found the piece interesting. I'm appreciative of the kind word.

I've always enjoyed your magazine and hope in the future to submit something "more on target". It's nice to know that the people involved in publishing your magazine are both concerned and professional.

Peter G. Badzey, Huntington Beach, CA

I received your rejection letter and felt I had to write back to you. I have been taught in writer's classes not to send "chatty" letters with my manuscripts, but since there isn't a manuscript in this envelope I figured it would be okay.

In your letter you apologize for sending me a form letter. Mrs. Bradley, your single rejection letter has given me more feedback than most of the other ones I've received combined. I want to thank you for taking the time to both read my short story and to provide me with comments. I have found that the most difficult thing about my new (and hopefully permanent in the future) career is that feedback is very rare. I very much appreciate your attention. Such a response is a great motivator for me to try harder and frequently.

*Finding a good new writer in the slush pile makes my day. Reading letters like these two is the next best thing.—**MZB***

I'm an editor-in-training, so I read everything — after Marion's through with it.

Chatty "letters to the editor" are fine, just not chatty cover letters (which, unless you're actually acquainted with us, merely mark you as a "wannabe"). — ***REH***

LATE BUT NOT LOST

Cheryl E. Marsh, Vermillion, SD

I recently moved and so missed voting in the Cauldron for issue #25. Now, I don't really think my single vote could have changed its outcome, but at least I would have had the satisfaction of knowing I voted for my choices. I'm very perturbed that "On the Holy Mountain" by Darrell Schweitzer didn't even place! Sometimes I don't agree with the Cauldron choices, but this seemed way off the mark. Not to denigrate the winners, but the power, grace, and ironic beauty of Mr. Schweitzer's story was rare and unusual, and deserved better than that.

*Never think that a single vote will have no effect. It isn't true in national politics (witness last Fall's California senatorial race) and certainly isn't true in the Cauldron voting. If it's any consolation, the office staff doesn't always agree with the Cauldron results either.—**HRJ***

AGAIN, AND AGAIN, AND...

Terri A. FitzSimons, Laguna Beach, CA

I have been a subscriber since very nearly the first issue, but I have not previously expressed just how much I appreciate this magazine. ...I can go back and read the first issues with very nearly the same enjoyment as the first time. I have, in the past couple of issues particularly, come to feel that the stories touch me in a way many others I've read don't. I feel, between the lines, lying "behind" them, so to speak, is a genuine caring for not just the characters, but people at large. It's a quality I haven't felt in other magazines. Having found it in your magazine, I'm disappointed when I don't feel that same "nurturing" quality in other writing, no matter how technically good it may otherwise be.

Aw, gee, blush. — ***REH and MZB***

DOES YOUR MOTHER KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING?

Lea C. Braff, Bridgeton, MO

I read the note you sent me, "MZB on Pen Names", with great interest and it's that which prompts this letter. You list four good reasons to use a pen name. There is a fifth. It's a psychological trick. As I write I tell myself, "You can say anything you want. Your name won't be on it. Mom or Dad won't know. Stop worrying about embarrassing yourself." Works like a charm every time. Before I hit on using a pen name, I had a lot more difficulty getting the words out. I don't think I even want to know the deep-seated roots of this.

*The hardest thing I had to learn was to write as if my mother weren't looking over my shoulder.—**MZB*** ❄

The Last Word

I hope you've enjoyed this issue; I think it contains some of the best stories and artwork we've ever published, and the next issue will be even better! We have a story by Katherine Blake, which continues with one of the characters from "The Death of Ranat's Pass" which we published last year — the new story is called "Penelli's Harp". We have a story from eluki bes shahar, another writer whose words paint vivid pictures in the mind. (Even so, the story *will* have artwork, by Laura Freas.)

The lead story is by Tanya Huff, and I know you'll fall in love with Bob Eggleton's dragon on the cover. Bob's friends are already asking him for posters of the artwork, and the guys at the printshop went nuts over it. Edwina Mayer, who had "Spaces" published in this issue, has another story in the next issue, entitled "Whom the Gods Would Discipline". In "Oops" (as you might surmise) you'll read the amusing adventures of a wizard who tries to perform a "good" spell and somehow doesn't quite get it right. And you'll meet a pair of unlikely practitioners of magic in "Get With Child a Mandrake Root", by two young writers, Kim Prosser and Lisa Swope.

Issue 29 has some good stuff, too. It'll start with another of Jo Clayton's wonderful stories, "Bloodsong", go on to a lesson in "Fatherhood" by Steven Piziks, and acquaint you with "Humphrey's Dilemma" by Cynthia McQuillin. You'll read the tale of a young witch who inadvertently does something terrible to her bratty brother, in "Caitlin's Magic", and learn of a queen's petition to a witch in "Cats of Time".

Well, those who read this column last time know that one of our production methods has changed. There was NO pasteup for this issue. We have a new scanner, and when we learn how to use it I think we'll be very pleased. At the moment, some things work well and some don't; halftones come out better than expected; line art makes HUGE files that seem to choke the computer. I suspect we need more RAM for our Mac Quadra.

We hope to get this issue back from the printer in time for Fantasy Worlds Festival, where our cover authors are co-guests of honor. The program book for this year's FWF will be a real collector's item, since its editor, Stephanie Shaver, has received a lot of REALLY nice artwork for it.

Marion and I will be in the NorthWest twice more this year (we already attended RustyCon). Look for us at NorWesCon in Seattle (early April) and at WesterCon in Portland (July 1 to 3, I believe). in vetween, I'll go to the Nebula Banquet in New York City in late April. And we're still planning to attend the WorldCon in Glasgow, in August!

— Rachel E. Holmen

When was the last time you rescued a fair maiden?

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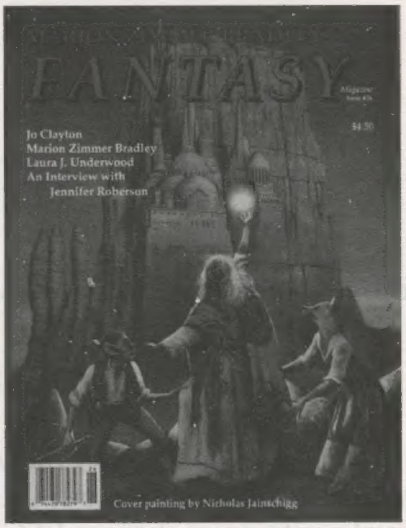

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The Cauldron — Issue #27

Story	Artist
❑ **Pot of Dreams,** C.J. Cherryh & Jane S. Fancher	❑ David A. Cherry
	❑ James Balkovek
❑ **The Chocolate Genie** by Ginger Strivelli	❑ Lori Deitrick
❑ **A Little Night Music** by Dorothy J. Heydt	❑ Gail Butler
❑ **Buttermilk Pancakes** by Peter A. Greene	❑ Barb Armata
❑ **Legacy** by Nora M. Mulligan	❑ Armand Cabrera
❑ **All in the Mind** by Lisa Deason	❑ Julia Lacquement
❑ **Ambeya** by Mary Mannon Reeves	❑ Mark Poole
❑ **The Aluka** by Joan Howe	❑ Alan Gutierrez
❑ **The Bargain** by C. Brochet	❑ Christina Wald
❑ **Spaces** by Edwina Mayer	❑ George Barr
❑ **Wouldn't Know It...** by Jennifer Cush	❑ Real Musgrave
❑ **A Sunset So Glorious** by Rycke Foreman	❑ George Barr

Only one ballot per reader, please!!!

Vote for your favorite stories and artists, then send the ballot to:

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by Sean Russell

When Tristam Flattery is summoned to try and revitalize a failing species of plant which seems to have almost magical medicinal powers, he is caught up in the grip of a destiny which will lead him to the ends of the known world—a voyage of discovery that has more to do with magic than with science...

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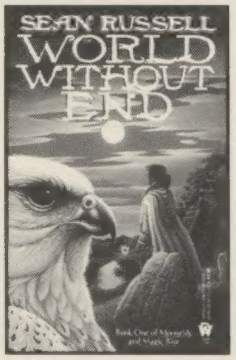

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by Karen Haber

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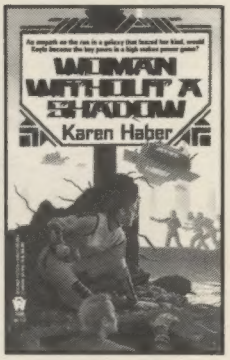

THE WHITE GRYPHON
by Mercedes Lackey & Larry Dixon

When a high-ranking noble who opposes the alliance between the survivors of Urtho's stronghold and the nomadic tribes known as the Black Kings is found murdered—seemingly torn apart by gryphon's claws—Skandranon and Amberdrake uncover a web of treachery and magical intrigue that will rock the very foundations of their world.

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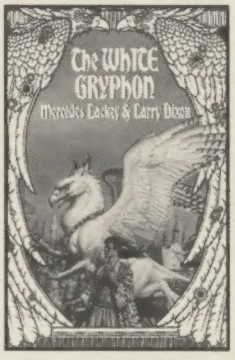

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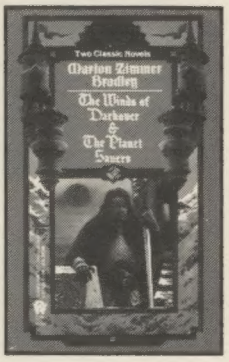

EXILES' RETURN: Book Three of The Ghatti's Tale
by Gayle Greeno

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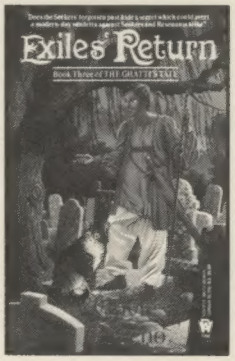

FIRE IN THE SKY: Shadowsong #1
by Jo Clayton

Shadith is gifted with empathy and a magic which enables her to act as arbiter for an interplanetary diplomatic corps. But will her powers be strong enough to make peace on a planet where two races vie for control while denying the very existence of a third?

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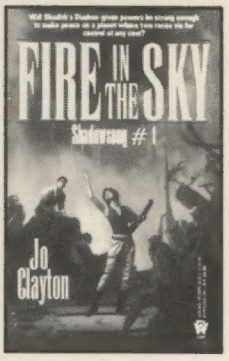

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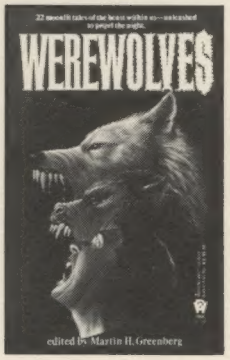

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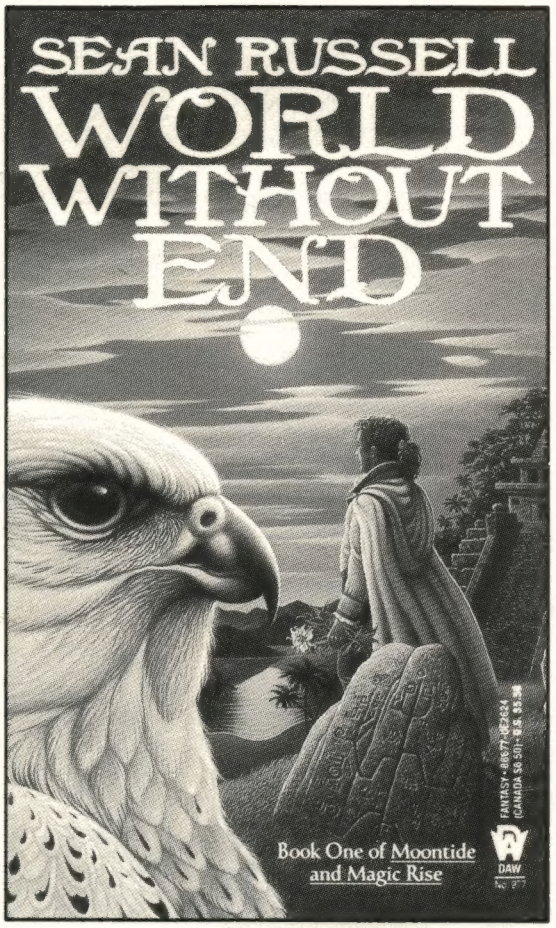

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